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T. Mann
Bonnemouth

"THE ANGLER'S REST."

MOUNTAIN, MEADOW, & MERE

A SERIES OF OUTDOOR SKETCHES OF SPORT, SCENERY, ADVENTURES, AND NATURAL HISTORY.

By G. Christopher Davies

WITH 16 *ILLUSTRATIONS BY BOSWORTH W. HARCOURT*

SECOND EDITION

Henry S. King & Co.

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PREFACE

MANY of the articles contained in this little volume originally appeared in the "Field" and some Magazines, to the several proprietors of which I am indebted for permission to republish my sketches.

I take this opportunity of acknowledging the unvarying kindness and courtesy of the Editor of the "Field" to me during my literary connection with that paper.

The four caricature vignettes are from the pencil of Mr. W. H. Woods, of Merton, Thetford, whose keen perception of the ludicrous and capacity for "taking a rise" out of any one are well known to his friends.

SEPTEMBER, 1873.

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MOUNTAIN, MEADOW, AND MERE

I.

INTRODUCTION

"Devotion to the beauty of the external forms of Nature affords to men of great excitability and a passionate sense of the beautiful an escape from many dangers and disturbances. The appetite for the beautiful in such men *must* be fed; and human beauty is a diet which leads to excessive stimulation, frequent vicissitudes of feeling at all events, and in every probability to the excitement of bitter and turbulent passions. The love and admiration of nature leads *from* all these; being, in truth, the safe outlet for every excess of sensibility. The pleasure so derived appears to be, of all human pleasures, the most exempt from correlative pains."

One day, while reading Thomas Ballantyne's "Essays in Mosaic," I came across the above passage excerpted from Taylor's "Notes from Books," and it struck me that I could not do better than take it as a text, to help me to explain why and how the following papers came to be written.

I need scarcely say that I have always found a delight in the beauty of the daisy-starred meadows, the heath-covered hills, the cool green woods, and the murmuring waters. Blue-and-white skies, or skies resplendent with sunrise or sunset hues, are pictures that always charm me. Most of all do I delight in being by running water. I love to sit on a grey boulder while the torrent dashes past me, its roar drowning all other sound. It seems to absorb all one's faculties, and one sits there and *rests*—perhaps dreams. *Thinking* is out of the question. It will be seen, therefore, that I agree very fully with the spirit of the extract I have quoted. I have one emendation to make, however. The love of Nature pure and simple—that is, the going out into the country for the express purpose of enjoying her wonderful beauty alone—is apt to develop a morbid spirit. It will lead to a despising of anything else, which, by contrast to "Nature" and the "natural," can be called "human" or "artificial." It will in effect lead to "Nature-worship;" and, instead of leading up to the adoration of the Creator through His works, will set His works up as the object of worship. It will be content with a god who has his being in leaves and stones. I am satisfied I take no exaggerated view of this tendency. Therefore I say, let the pursuit of Nature's beauty go hand in hand with some other pursuit, or

even be subservient to it. Whether it be the harmless occupations of botanizing, geologizing, or butterfly-hunting, or the more exciting and dangerous sports of shooting, fishing, or boating, there ought to be something to occupy part of one's attention and prevent all one's energies being devoted to pure admiration and eye-pleasing.

Most men have sporting instincts at heart, and therefore they will agree with me in my recommendation of sport; but there are some poor puling creatures, who sit down and weep sentimentally over the sufferings of the sportman's victims. I class them with those members of the female sex (I don't like to call them by the honest old-fashioned term of "women") who agitate questions they know nothing about. The *Saturday Review* calls the latter the "Shrieking Sisterhood." I should call the others "The Weeping Brotherhood." I am not going to bore my readers with a learned disquisition on the alleged cruelty of sport. I have made up my mind as to what is cruel and what is not, and I strive to avoid the former. It is a question for every man's own conscience.

Well, then, suppose a man to be an admirer of Nature, and a sportsman. Suppose him also to have the knack of putting down his impressions in writing. Is it to be wondered at that he should do so—to give

his friends some small share of the pleasure he has himself derived? I fancy I am not alone in the feeling I experience when I am enjoying some lovely scene, or taking place in some exciting sport, that I should enjoy it more if some friend were with me to share it. I have often felt that part of the pleasure of looking at an exquisite picture was lost to me because some bosom friend was not by my side to see it also.

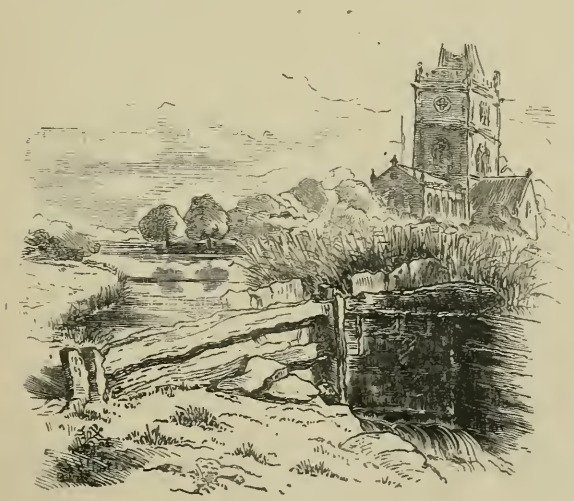
It was that feeling which induced me to write these papers in the first instance, and it is that feeling which has led to their being brought out in a collected form. I utterly disclaim any literary ambition with regard to them.

Many people have a mistaken notion that when a man dabbles in literature he must of necessity neglect his business. Can anything be more absurd? Take the case of a bachelor in lodgings. What is he to do in the long winter evenings after his day's work is over? Why not amuse himself as well by writing an article as in any other way? Yet, if it is known that he does so, he comes to be looked upon as an idle fellow, rather clever, perhaps, but decidedly not a business man. If, on the contrary, he does nothing different to the majority of young men, but spends his time in a billiard-room or debating class—both which ways of spending an evening require rather more time

and attention than writing an article—he escapes condemnation.

One word as to the frequent use of the word "I" in this book. It has an egotistical sound about it, and I have striven to avoid it as much as possible; but in papers like these it is manifestly impossible to do without its constant use.

As I wrote these articles the freshness of the hills and streams seemed to be wafted over me by memory's aid. I could not wish them to do more than to bring similar impressions to the reader.



THE LOCK.

II.

CARP FISHING

WELL can I remember, during a bird-nesting foray, when a chosen friend and I had rambled far from the town, up beyond the waving uplands into the heart of the Welsh border hills, coming upon a lonely tarn from which a heron slowly flew at our approach, and gazing with a feeling akin to awe at the black water, the tall rushes and flags, and the belt of fir-trees that encircled three sides of it. The feeling of awe was changed to one of wonderment and delight as we saw, circling about and breaking the calmness of the water, dozens and dozens of big brown back-fins projecting above the surface. We had little difficulty in seeing that they belonged to mighty carp. I am not usually a good hand at keeping a secret, but the secret of that pool and its denizens we kept to ourselves for many a year—even

until the fear of rheumatism forbade us to fish it often ourselves, for it could only be fished by wading knee-deep among the rushes. Strictly speaking, we had no right to wet a line there; but, from visiting it often without interruption, we came to look upon the tarn as our exclusive property.

What heavy burdens we oftentimes carried home!—never a fish under a pound and a half, many up to four pounds, but few beyond that weight. The pool, I suppose, had never been fished except by us for the last thirty years, and the very abundance of the fish prevented them growing to any enormous size; although now and then, out at the end of the flags, where we could never reach, a head would pop up to suck some insect down, with a sounding gulp that would make our hearts beat faster with excitement than they have ever done since.

Our tarn was situated in a hollow on a top of a hill, and had a very boggy and treacherous bottom. More than once have we stood in one place too long, till the flooring of matted roots has sunk lower and lower, and at last, with a horrid swirl of black mud, has given way, when one or other of us, but for the ready hand and active help of his companion, might have found himself fattening the fishes without hope of recovery. Once we set some night-lines there. On a Friday evening

in June we laid two dozen of them down, baited with large lobworms. On the Saturday half-holiday we took them up. Seventeen carp, from 2lbs. to 4lbs. in weight, lay gasping on the soft carpet of fir-needles. We caught seven or eight more with the legitimate rod and line, and, what is more, we actually carried the whole of them home. We were a bit ashamed of that exploit, though. It was all very well once in a way, but too unsportsmanlike to be repeated often. It became a question what to do with the fish after we had caught them; but the avidity with which our poorer neighbours received the present of a few decided the use to which to apply our spoil. To tell the truth, we didn't much care about eating any ourselves. They had a muddy taste, which we found very disagreeable. After such wholesale slaughter, it will be a relief to the reader to see a picture of an ordinary day's sport. We always found that a dull, warm day, with now and then a shower, was the best, and that thunder in the air rather improved our chances. On such days, if we could procure a half-holiday, we would set off at a long, swinging pace (our wind and muscle were in capital condition then), and in due time reach the tarn. As I have said, on three sides it was surrounded by a wood, and on the other side was so shallow and muddy that it was "unfishable." Having reached the tarn, pray,

reader, accompany us in imagination as we dive into the wood and rig up our tackle—two rods each, long and slender, with fine lines, light porcupine-quill floats, no shot, and a moderate-sized red worm for bait. Off with our shoes and stockings, tuck up our trousers, then cautiously and quietly pushing through the underwood, we enter the water and wade through the flags, which reach as high as our heads; then, fixing each foot firmly on a root, we drop the lines as gently as possible into the water. How quiet everything is! A heron stands patiently on the shallows, and another is trying, with ludicrously unsuccessful efforts, to perch on the slight topmost branches of a fir. A wild duck leads her brood by the rushes, while nodding water-hens and white-headed coots intersect the water. What curious little black balls the young water-hens are! Hillo! what's that? A splash that echoes through the woods, and a little black ball has gone down the hungry maw of a pike, the only one in the pool, I think—at least, I could never hook one of its descendants or brothers and sisters, although I have tried early and late, and the haunt of that monster is too far for me to cast. He lies cheek by jowl with the big carp. No bites yet, and the floats lie as still on the water as if there was never a fish in the pool, and we fall into a reverie, as we gaze up at one, two, aye, three kestrels hovering above us.

How very still it has suddenly become, and how dark, as the thunder-cloud throws its shadows on the pool! I am actually afraid of breaking the stillness by shouting to Campbell over yonder to ask what sport he has had. All the water birds have sought the shelter of the rushes, and I begin to feel quite uncanny, when I am startled by a sudden twitch of the loop of running line which I am absently twisting about my finger. See! the float has disappeared; strike! and up comes the line—no fish. In with it again! We must be more watchful; but we shall have no more bites until the storm is over. A weird rustling goes through the firs, and the water is caught by sudden flaws of wind. We reel up and seek the shelter of the wood. A flash and a rattle, another and another, and the water is whitened with the wind and the rain. Then, as the storm passes away, we run to the brow of the hill, to see it sweeping through the valleys and glens. How dense the cloud seems! The flashes dart to earth and return to the cloud with almost equal brilliancy.

As soon as our lines are in the water again, the fun begins. The ripples are still on the water, and we can scarcely see the tiny floats. As it gets calmer, one moves a little; then, after a while, a little more, and then walks off quietly along the surface. I tighten my line; no need to strike hard. The carp is a soft, though

leather-mouthed fish. Whizz! What a dash! Again, and again, and then backwards, and I have to pull the slack of the line in with my hand; then out again and boring down into the mud, and—yes, actually there is a bite at the other float. I shout to my friend for help, but see him with a rod in each hand, both bending and springing like mad; the water in front of him white with the struggles of his prey—as white as his face, and as my own probably is, with excitement. Ah! one of mine is off, and the wet and sticky coils of the line fly in my face. Never mind; I land the other, a good three-pounder, and rush round to Campbell's assistance. We land both his fish, each above 2lbs. So through the rest of the afternoon; to continue the picture would be monotonous.

The carp there were vigorous fish, and gave plenty of play at first; but after four or five frantic rushes they submitted to be towed in, a dead, heavy weight, scarcely giving a flap of the tail till they were banked.

As our tackle had need to be light, we had to exercise considerable caution in safely landing them. Our plan was to walk slowly backwards until the carp were hampered in the rushes, and then seize them in our arms and rush ashore, generally, by the way, getting the line entangled in the underwood. We would take home from six to a dozen fish apiece. There were such

incredible numbers of carp in the pool, that it was no wonder we had good sport with this otherwise shy fish. There was no lack of incidents to while away the monotony of waiting. A snake would swim along close to us, with its head and neck above water; or a fox would steal along by the rushes, on the look-out for some sleeping water-fowl. Before leaving, too, we used to climb up to the ledge of rocks which overhung the vale, and take a glimpse at the thousands of rabbits feeding among the débris at the bottom of the cliff; if a stone was thrown down, the rocks seemed absolutely moving with them. Then, when the fairy-like glens and valleys, that looked like highways to the sunset, became undistinguishable from the rugged hills, and the rock dove had sought her nest in a rabbit burrow or in a crevice of the old hunting tower, we would turn homewards, tired and happy.

III.

THE SHROPSHIRE MERES

In all the pleasant country around the Wrekin, there are few prettier districts than that which forms the emerald setting to the silver meres of Salop. Devoid of the magnificence of the Welsh hills which form its western horizon, it has a quiet beauty peculiarly its own.

Situate in the north-west of Shropshire, Ellesmere, the starting-point of the mere district, is a pretty, quiet little town, having for its chief attractions *the* Mere *par excellence;* a handsome church, of cruciform plan (and, inside, the gloom of the middle ages); a hill, on the summit of which once stood a castle formerly given in frank marriage to Llewellyn, Prince of North Wales, by King John, and which, after often changing owners, was destroyed during the civil wars of the seventeenth century, not a stone of it now remaining, and the site

long ago converted into a spacious bowling-green; and on the opposite side of the mere the mansion of Oately, with its well-kept terraces leading down to the water's edge, and its undulating park, with its "tall ancestral trees" and groups of deer knee-deep in fern. The mere lies on the east of the town, and covers some 116 acres. Its name is derived, say some old chronicles, from its being *Aels* Mere, or the greatest mere; others aver that it derives its name from the quantity of eels it contains. The Saxon derivation is by far the most probable. There are six other meres—Black Mere and Kettle Mere, so close together as to be almost one; White Mere, Newton Mere, Colemere, and, lying a little out of the group to the south, Crosemere; all these are smaller than Ellesmere. There are other meres and pools at no very great distance, but not sufficiently large or near to be worth mentioning. Boggy hollows indicate spots which meres must have occupied in former days. With the exception of Crosemere, all the meres named would be contained within a circle of three miles in diameter. Crosemere would lie a mile and a half outside this circle to the south; Ellesmere would form its north-west boundary. The aspect of the country is somewhat peculiar—it is full of undulations, and the undulations are short and steep; altogether it looks like an assemblage of vast molehills. In the hollows

between these molehills the meres nestle, and the high-hedged lanes wind in and out.

Ellesmere can boast of its two wooded islets, sacred to the large table-like nest of the swans; and woe to the unlucky boatsman who, in the breeding season, runs foul of the pendent branches. The male swan swims slowly and statelily around the island where his mate is sitting, and at the jar of the branches sallies forth to attack the invader, whose only hope of deliverance lies in instant flight. Some years ago, I believe, there was the enormous number of 121 swans upon this sheet of water; now there are not half that number. From the mere, all that is seen of the town through the trees is the church upon its higher ground, and a few houses, with their gardens reaching to the mere. To the left are the boat-houses nestling under the shade of several tall trees. The boats are few in number, and very safe. Owing to the inequality of the neighbouring land, the mere is subject to sudden squalls, and sailing is attended with some danger; therefore the boats for the use of the public are unprovided with sails. The pleasantest time to be on the mere is during an autumn sunset. On the water is perfect calm; over the church and the many-tinted trees the sky is one pale golden flame, which deepens into the most delicate rose, then darkens into crimson, and finally dies away, to give

place to the pale moonlight. All these colours are reflected in the water, on the white breast of the swans, and from the glittering windows and pinnacles of Oately. If the water is thrown up by the oars, the drops sparkle and colour like a fairy fountain.

Unfortunately that prolific weed, the *Anacharis alsinastrun*, has of late years spread very considerably in all the meres, notably so in Ellesmere. It was first introduced into this part of the country with some timber from Canada, which had been brought to Baggy Moor. From thence it filled the ditches and canals, and is gradually filling the meres. Years ago the weeds used to be cut and the mere netted, the coarse fish being given to the poor. This is not done now, and the weeds have gained an ascendancy which I am afraid they will sustain. Boating has already become difficult in many parts of Ellesmere, and fishing wellnigh impracticable.

There is a peculiarity of the Ellesmere water which I can scarcely account for, but which, I am informed, some other sheets of water in England also present. To use the local name, it "breaks." Every summer, for a longer or shorter time, the water becomes full of some matter held in suspension. In appearance it is like small bran, rendering it impossible sometimes to see more than a foot through the water.

The mere becomes of a greenish hue, and to leeward, where it is the worst, it gives rise to a very disagreeable smell. It is always worse in hot weather. To the eye the matter held in suspension seems to consist of husk-like pieces of fibre, such as might be stripped off a plant. From this I was inclined to think that the Anacharis is chiefly to blame for this appearance, and that in some way the outer coating of the plant sloughs off and floats during its decay in the water. This is, however, but a supposition.* The other meres do not "break" to such an extent; but then they are not so full of the Anacharis, and the water is probably purer. While the water is "broken" the fish refuse to bite.

Up and down the trunks of the trees the woodpeckers glide and hammer, and it is astonishing how far the sound of the tapping may be heard on a quiet day. Steadying themselves with their tails, which are placed firmly against the trunk, they hammer away until a small piece of bark is dislodged, and then the long and slender tongues shoot out, returning each time with some insect on their tips. In the shallows the long-legged heron patiently stands, flying lazily away when approached. There is a heronry at Halston, some

* A correspondent of the "Field" said the organism causing the "break" was *Echinella articulata*, a doubtful genus, some authors considering it a vegetable and some an animal organism. It is depicted in Sowerby's English Botany, Vol. xxii. p. 208, tab. 2555. I should much like to know what it really is.

five miles away, and in the morning and evening the herons may be observed going to or returning from the isolated marshes and pools. Like a streak of blue light, the kingfisher shoots from some branch or post; and often during the summer the presence of white-winged, graceful terns adds an additional charm to the mere.

To a sportsman's eye nothing is more distasteful than the hundreds of trimmers scattered over the surface of the water, and the netting of under-sized fish carried on by those who have obtained leave to have a day's "sport." It is a sickening thing to see, as I once saw, baskets full of young jack barely 8 inches long, all head, and useless for food, massacred—there is no other word for it. The pike sometimes run large, but of late years few big ones have been captured. The trimmers are baited with dead roach, and, luckily for the pike and the fair sportsman, the eels get the largest share of the bait. The rod fishing in this mere is open to the public, and I believe it is not difficult to procure leave to fish in some of the others.

A short walk along the Whitchurch road brings us to a gloomy-looking hollow, at the bottom of which, silent and still, lies Blackmere. On three sides the oak woods rise, looking very sombre in their dark green livery; and on the remaining side the canal is only separated from the mere by a narrow strip of land; beyond that

are the open fields. Looking closely, a narrow passage can be descried through the thick of the wood; this leads to Kettlemere, much smaller than its neighbour. Around both meres the *Osmunda regalis*, or royal fern, lifts its seed-bearing tops and spreads its large fronds. This fern grows here in great profusion, and attains a large size. When we push out from the boat-house on Blackmere we come upon a bed of the very rare small yellow or Highland waterlily (*Nuphar pumila*). This plant is not mentioned in Leighton's "Flora of Shropshire," and most probably did not exist here when that work was written. It has hitherto been supposed to grow only on mountain lakes. In fact, all these meres are the habitats of numerous rare plants, a catalogue of which would be tedious. As we row along the margin we brush against the fringing sweetgale and catch its fragrant odour.

That upright, stick-like object moving along the surface is the neck and head of a great crested grebe, swimming low in the water, to escape observation. There! it dives suddenly; by-and-by it will reappear at some distance, and, if it thinks you are not looking, will rise out of the water until it swims as lightly and buoyantly as other water-birds. We have it on our meres all the year round, but, in the daytime at least, it keeps scrupulously far from land and in the deeper

water. It is much oftener seen on this mere than its common relative, the dabchick. The movements of the latter are so quick, it is so small, and such a remarkably expert diver, that you do not often catch a glimpse of it. The grebes are seldom seen upon the wing except in the breeding season, when they seem particularly awkward in their flight. That floating lump of black, wet weed is a grebe's nest. Lift the weeds from the top and you will find four or five eggs—one, perhaps, the last laid, tolerably white, the others stained to different degrees of dirtiness. The interior of the nest is hot and steaming, and not cold, as you would at first imagine. That yellow stump projecting above the water-lily leaves is the beak of a water-hen, who is holding on to the stalks with her feet, all her body being concealed under water. The water of Blackmere is very clear, and of a great depth and coldness.

Crossing the canal, and bearing to the right, we come to Whitemere, a very pretty sheet of water, with a Swiss cottage on its marge peculiarly suited to picnic parties. This is a famous place for widgeon and other wildfowl, and a capital pike pool.

Turning sharply to the left, we cross the country to Colemere. Passing beneath an avenue of firs, the feet fall softly on a thick, brown carpet of fir needles. We reach the boat-house, and push off. Along the oppo-

site side is a dense belt of tall reeds, which in the summer is alive with the low songs of the reed wrens. These birds breed in great abundance here, and their nests are worthy of description. Three or four tall reeds are chosen, and supported by these, at some distance from the water, the nest is made. It is singularly deep in structure, with the top contracted so as to form a purse-like receptacle for the eggs, which are thus prevented from rolling out when the reeds bend before the wind. It is slightly but strongly made, chiefly of coarse grasses, and the eggs are of a mottled, greenish brown. In seeking the nests the wader must beware of the decayed reeds, which have left a pavement of sharp-fanged stumps.

Peculiar to this mere, and I think to no other sheet of water in England, are the green moss balls (*Conferva ægagropila*) and brown balls composed of fir leaves. It is supposed that the bottom of the mere is troubled with conflicting eddies and currents, caused no doubt by springs, and that these currents catch up the fir leaves that fall from the trees on the south side of the mere and roll them up, together with particles of confervæ, into balls of different sizes, even up to two feet in diameter. The moss balls are composed entirely of confervæ. The currents convey these balls to the opposite side of the mere (where the reeds are), and there

they may be found in thousands at a depth of three or four feet. The cohesion of each ball is perfect. The other meres present nothing more noticeable in their appearance or denizens than those already described. This mere district is often visited by rare birds. In a keeper's house I have seen a splendid specimen of a peregrine falcon, which he had shot some time ago. He also informed me that he had killed an osprey here, and that another had been seen haunting one of the meres. Altogether the district of the Shropshire meres presents a rich field, both to the observer of natural history and to the lover of quiet woodland and lake scenery.

CAUGHT AT LAST.

IV.

PAN.

THEY told me Pan was dead, and I was fain
To think that, with the other gods, his reign
Was over, and the onward march of truth
Had proved him nothing but in very sooth
A mere tradition of the olden time,
When man in fancy heard his mystic rhyme
In cadence sad and sweet ring through the wood.
(Pan played alone, but still he deemed it good
That wandering mortal sometimes heard his playing
On reedy flute, from where the bulrush swaying
In summer breezes, curtained in his home,
Roofed for a roof with white and azure dome.—
For Pan was Nature's god, and had great love
For Nature's brother, Man, and oft he strove

To soften Man with song, that he might gain
Sweet sympathy and healing from the strain.)
They told me Pan was dead, and I, who love
The brown, sweet earth below and sky above,
And green of summer trees, and dance of leaves
In flood of sunshine, and the cloud which weaves
Long, shifting shadows 'mong the sheeny corn ;
Who love to hear the lark's dear carol borne
Down from the dazzling light which floods the day,
To gladden the inner soul, and fright away
What's there of care and pain ; who, in a word,
Love Nature dearly, and would love her Lord
The more through her, grieved her interpreter—
Great Pan was but a myth, and dead to her.
So musing and so sorrowing, down the stream
I floated, while the misty weather-gleam
Grew golden, and the delicate pearly green
Of quiet sunset barred the western sheen.
Between the banks all bright with marigold
And starlike daisies, meadow-sweet, and manifold
Such odorous flowers, and fringed with pendent trees
That kissed the quiet wave and sang low lullabies,
Stirred by soft breezes—my light boat drew on
With motion gentle as a floating swan,
Till in a quiet cove she drove aground
Beneath the silvering willows.

All around
The quiet peace of evening fell, and sound
Was only half a sound, that more profound
The silence made. The endless monotone
Of gnats that danced in level lanes of light
Part of the silence seemed. The cushat's moan
From distant coppice saddened the coming night.
The while the river o'er its shallows ran
I lay and thought me of the great god Pan,
And through my musings ran a vague regret,
A longing which my inner soul did fret
(As seeming wrong), that all the pulsing life
And varied beauty with which earth was rife
Had no alive and outward bodiment
Wherewith the soul in converse reverent
Might hold commune: a being set between
Man and his Maker.
As the yellow sheen
Died out of the West, and from the depth of blue
Shone faint white glimmerings where the stars hung through,
I heard a low, clear strain come up the vale;
As when in April nights the nightingale
Rehearses his love-song, but through it ran
A rhythm so exceeding sweet that Pan
Alone could be the player. No halt or flaw

Its beauty marred. Then suddenly I saw
The god, across the stream, amid the sedge
And misty wreaths along the river's edge,
And whether he spoke, or whether a subtle sense
'Twixt him and me made an intelligence
I know not, but there came from him to me—
"If I am dead, thy God is near to thee;
There needs no other mediator than
The one He gave,—at once a God and Man;
Look thou within thyself, perchance the link
That's missing has been broke by thee. Yet think,
If so thou wilt, I am not dead, but merged
In one I too must love."
Then surged
Out from the West a sudden wind which tossed
The branches in the wood, and so was lost
At once the silence and the song. I lay
As one awaked, and watched the misty cloud
Enclose the starlit meadow in its shroud,
Then took the oars, and silent rowed away.

V.

SCOULTON GULLERY

A SOMEWHAT similar instinct to that which compels the salmon to leave the salt water of the sea, and ascend the rivers and streams, to deposit its spawn, would appear to lead the black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*) from the sea-shore and cliffs, which one would naturally suppose to be its proper habitat, to the inland lakes and meres, where it breeds. The change is not less great in the bird than it is in the fish—from sea insects, shell-fish, and odds and ends of salted articles of food, to in the case of the salmon fresh-water insects and worms, and in the case of the gull to land insects, slugs, worms, and other the dainty dishes of inland birds. But the salmon affect many of our fresh-water rivers; the gulls have only a few favourite breeding-places, where, however, they breed in enormous num-

bers. Scoulton Mere, in Norfolk, is perhaps the chief of these, and is a sight no one who journeys in its neighbourhood should miss. It is situate near Hingham, and is twenty-eight miles from the sea. In that county of lakes, it may be interesting to notice the difference in the designations of its numerous sheets of water. The majority are called "Broads," a term peculiar to Norfolk. The others of any size are called "Meres." The latter have no communication with any rivers, but are hollows in the surface, caused, so geologists tell us, by erosion, and supplied by springs. The Broads are always in intimate connection with the slow running rivers of that county—the Yare, the Bure, and the Waveney. At one time the whole of the Broad district must have been under water, as is evidenced by its flat, marshy character. As the years rolled on, the waters subsided, the hollows silted up, as they are doing year by year now, with reeds and other aquatic vegetation, which, decaying, helped to fill up the lakes, until marsh took the place of water, and after drainage, hard, firm land the place of marsh. The remaining waters, shallow and broad, took the name of "Broads."

The black or brown patch on the head, from which the name of the gull is derived, appears only during the breeding season, and is darkest when first as-

sumed. It has been observed that the change of colour is not caused by a moulting of the feathers, but that the pigment slowly spreads over them and afterwards disappears without any change of plumage. The note of this gull is a harsh cackle, and has led to its being called by some writers the "laughing-gull." The true laughing gull, however, is a distinct species.

There are a few other noted breeding-places of this gull in England, notably one at Twigmoor, where the spot is such as to suit their apparent requirements, namely, shallow water, and spongy, almost inaccessible marshes; but Scoulton Mere is the most numerous colony known. It was, therefore, with some degree of pleasure that I found business required my presence within two miles of the mere. It was a beautiful July day, and the drive through the well-farmed country to Hingham, and thence to Scoulton, was extremely pleasant. The corn-fields gave promise of a splendid harvest, and their cool green waves were agreeably diversified with the scarlet poppies, or "redweed" of the farmer. From some cause or other, there appeared to be an unusual abundance of these, and some fields showed more scarlet than green; others were apparently free from the flowers save in the furrows; and as we sped by, behind a fast horse, the alternate green of the corn and the scarlet flash of the radiating fur-

rows, with the deep, dark green of the woods behind, and intensest summer blue above, afforded a rare contrast of colour to the artistic eye.

The mere, we found, lay in a sheltered spot, bordered, however, by the road on its most open side. Leaving the highway, we entered a cool avenue of magnificent rhododendron bushes, quite ten feet in height, and presently came to the boat-house. Embarking in a wide tub of a boat, and impelled by a pair of the stoutest sculls one could well imagine—and none too stout to make any way among the thick weeds—we pushed out into the open water. The mere, with its islands, contains some eighty acres. The large flat marsh in the middle, locally called the Hearth, and by Bewick the "haft," contains a large proportion of the eighty acres. The greater part of it is covered with low bushes, and long reeds, flags, and grass, and is very spongy and wet. On this the gulls breed. Their nests are built on the ground, and are not a yard apart. They are of somewhat similar character to those of the coots and waterhens; made of aquatic vegetation, and but very slightly cup-shaped. Like those of the last-named birds too, they are, in places where the water is likely to rise and flood them, raised a foot, or even more, above the surface, but they invariably have their foundation upon it. Only once has a nest been found in one of the low

bushes, and this was probably a freak on the part of some eccentric bird of experimentive genius. The nests are too loosely built, and have too little cohesion, to rest safely among branches. The eggs are generally three in number, and of a yellowish olive brown, spotted with darker brown; but, as in the case of the guillemot's egg, there is great variety in the colour. Sometimes they are of light, unspotted blue.

The mere has been a breeding-place from time immemorial. Its attractions consist undoubtedly in the shallowness of its waters, averaging only two or three feet in depth over the greater part of it, as we found by sounding with the oars; and the consequent abundance of weeds—both causes adducing to the prolixity of insect life. Add to this the advantages offered for a safe breeding-place by the "hearth," and marshy ground in the vicinity, some parts of which are even now inaccessible to the practised marshman, and the whole of which must have once been in a similar condition. Once fixed upon as a breeding-place, nothing but the extermination of the gulls would have caused its abandonment. And had it not been strictly preserved by the proprietor, and a fine belt of trees planted around it, to secure it from intrusion, it would doubtless have been ere this a thing of the past.

In February the gulls begin to gather together on

the sea-coast, and a flock of them comes to Scoulton as pioneers, wheeling around and around for a while, and then darting away, to return in a few days with more. In a month the great body will have arrived, and the nesting begins. If disturbed, they rise into the air in countless numbers, seeming in the distance like a snow-storm. The noise of their swooping wings and their harsh cries is deafening. They may be seen sweeping round the branches of the trees, picking off the "locusts," as the country people term the cockchafers, or foraging over the fields in flocks, like white rooks. Mice are eagerly devoured by them, and it is even said that young birds are swallowed sometimes; but this I very much doubt. I never met anybody who had seen an instance of such cannibalism in the gull tribe. The eggs are laid in April and May, and by the end of June all the broods are hatched. This is the time to pay a visit to the mere. The end farthest from the road is the part most frequented by the birds, and there they sit on the water in thousands, swimming as light as a feather, the variegated plumage of the old and young having a striking effect. Formerly the old birds seem to have been killed for the sake of eating, but now the eggs are taken instead, and are boiled and eaten cold, like lapwings' eggs, to which they have a similar taste, but are not quite so good. They are

sometimes palmed off upon an unwary purchaser as lapwings' eggs; but the fraud may easily be detected, as there is a decided difference in the shape of the egg, to say nothing of the colour. The right of collecting and selling the eggs used to be rented for fifteen pounds a year. I do not know whether this is the case now, but the eggs are collected and sold on the spot for eighteen-pence or two shillings a score, and at much higher prices in Norwich and Lynn markets. The gathering of the eggs is no easy task, owing to the spongy and dangerous nature of the soil, and the vigorous swoops of the indignant gulls around the intruder's head. Only the first laying is taken, and only a prescribed number of raids is made in the season. Afterwards the birds are left to hatch their young in peace. The number collected is about fifteen hundred or two thousand a day, and sometimes three thousand. From this fact some idea of the enormous number of birds may be gained. Once, after the gulls had had a year of rest, the enormous number of forty thousand eggs was gathered in one season.

In July and August the gulls begin to leave and make their way to the sea-coast. They can be heard passing overhead in the night, and a few years ago a large flock came over Norwich and were attracted and confused by the glare of the lamps, for many were found

dead and disabled at the foot of the lamp-posts, against which they had dashed.

Away to the bonny open sea, to dash and sport with the waves, to forget the confined inland life, and the troubles of a family, in the cool salt breeze, and the sparkling ocean; who would not envy them their holiday?

At the time I visited the mere the business of hatching was over, and the number of gulls had in some degree lessened, but the number remaining was sufficiently great to excite wonderment and surprise. We rowed quietly through the yellow waterlilies, disturbing enormous carp, which were basking in the heat, descending quietly round corners on unsuspecting gulls which took to wing with a tremendous scurry, and noting carefully the leading features of the novel sight. In addition to the gulls, grebes great and small, wild ducks, snipe, water-rails, coots, and water-hens breed in numbers, and weasels, rats, and other vermin swarm, attracted by the abundance of animal food. When the gulls have all left, the silence must, one would imagine, be as oppressive to the keeper as the silence of a water-mill, when it is stopped, is to a miller. We could have passed many an hour on and about the mere, for it was very beautiful. There was the calm blue water, with the golden lilies floating on its surface, like stars of

light, and the white lilies in motionless flocks as of the gulls themselves at eventide; the lacing foliage of the encircling trees casting welcome shade, the songs of many a warbler, the wheeling gulls, and the luxuriant vegetation of the islands, all united to please the eye and ear; but the birds were shining brilliantly white against the deep blue black of a thunder-cloud: and the sultry ominous silence that came over all warned us to be off and away from the tempest, and with one last, long look, we bade adieu to Scoulton Gullery.

As a rider to the foregoing sketch, I think it may be interesting to the reader if I quote an older account of the habits of these birds. It is taken from Morris's "British Birds," where it is stated to be quoted from Dr. Plot's "History of Staffordshire."

"But the strangest whole-footed water-fowl that frequents this county is the *Larus cinereus*, Ornithologi, the *Larus cinereus tertius*, Aldrovandi, and the *Cepphus* of Gesner and Turner; in some counties called the Black-cap, in others the Sea or Mire Crow; here the Pewit; which being of the migratory kind, come annually to certain pooles in the estate of the Right Worshipfull Sir Charles Skrymsher, Knight, to build and breed, and to no other estate in or near the county, but of this family, to which they have belonged 'ultra hominum memoriam,' and never moved from it,

though they have changed their station often. They anciently came to the old Pewit poole above mentioned, about half a mile S. W. of Norbury church, but it being their strange quality (as the whole family will tell you, to whom I refere the reader for the following relation) to be disturbed and remove upon the death of the head of the family, as they did within memory, upon the death of James Skrymsher, Esq., to Offley Moss, near Woods Eves, which Moss, though containing two gentlemen's land, yet (which is very remarkable) the Pewits did discern betwixt the one and the other, and build only on the land of the next heir, John Skrymsher, Esq., so wholy are they addicted to this family.

"At which Moss they continued about three years, and then removed to the old Pewit poole again, where they continued to the death of the late said John Skrymsher, Esq., which happening on the eve to our Lady-day, the very time when they are laying their eggs, yet so concerned were they at this gentleman's death, that notwithstanding this tye of the Law of Nature, which has ever been held to be universal and perpetual, they left their nest and eggs; and though they made some attempts of laying again at Offley Moss, yet they were still so disturbed that they bred not at all that year. The next year after they went to Aqualat, to another gentleman's estate of the same

family (where though tempted to stay with all the care imaginable), yet continued there but two years, and then returned again to another poole of the next heir of John Skrymsher, deceased, called Shebben poole, in the Parish of High Offley, where they continue to this day, and seem to be the propriety, as I may say (though a wild-fowle), of the Right Worshipfull Sir Charles Skrymsher, Knight, their present Lord and Master.

"But being of the migratory kind, their first appearance is not till about the latter end of February, and then in number scarce above six, which come, as it were, as harbingers to the rest, to see whether the hafts or islands in the pooles (upon which they build their nests) be prepared for them, but these never so much as lighten, but fly over the poole, scarce staying an hour; about the sixth of March following there comes a pretty considerable flight, of a hundred or more, and then they alight on the hafts, and stay all day, but are gone again at night. About our Lady-day or sooner, in a forward spring, they come to stay for good, otherwise not till the beginning of April, when they build their nests, which they make not of sticks, but of leaves and rushes, making them but shallow, and laying generally but four eggs, three and five more rarely, which are about the bigness of a small hen's egg.

"The hafts or islands are prepared for them between Michlemas and Christmas, by cutting down the reeds and rushes, and pulling them aside in the nooks and corners of the hafts, and in the valleys, to make them level, for should they be permitted to rot on the islands, the Pewits would not endure them. After three weeks' sitting the young ones are hatched, and about a month after are already to flye, which usually happens on the third of June, when the proprietor of the poole orders them to be driven and catch'd, the Gentry comeing in from all parts to see the sport; the manner thus,—they pitch a rabbit-net on the bank side, in the most convenient place over against the hafts, the net in the middle being about ten yards from the side, but close at the ends in the manner of a bow; then six or seven men wade into the poole beyond the Pewits over against the net, with long staves, and drive them from the hafts, whence they all swim to the bank side, and landing, run like Lapwings into the net, where people standing ready, take them up and put them into two penns made within the bow of the net, which are built round, about three yards diameter and a yard length or somewhat better, with small stakes driven into the ground in a circle, and interwoven with broom and other raddle. In which manner there have been taken of them in one morning fifty dozens at a driving.

"But they commonly appoint three days of driving them, within fourteen days or thereabouts of the 2nd and 3rd of June, which while they are doing, some have observed a certain old one that seems to be somewhat more concerned than the rest, being clamorous, and striking down upon the very heads of the men; which has given ground of suspicion that they have some government among them, and that this is their prince, who is so much concerned for its subjects. And it is further observed that when there is great plenty of them the lent corn is so much the better, and the cow pastures too, by reason they pick up all the worms and the 'Fern Flyes.'"

VI.

WILD SHOOTING

By "Wild Shooting" I mean—not pheasant shooting in the coverts, partridge shooting over the stubbles, grouse shooting on the moors, not even wildfowl shooting and snipe shooting—but a mixture of all, with a predominance of the wildfowl element. This is undoubtedly hard to obtain now, but there are places where it can be enjoyed in perfection. One such is described in the following sketch. I regret that I dare not state its exact whereabouts. The shooting is free, or at least the permission of the tenants to go over the land is all that is required, and that is seldom withheld. I am far from wishing to cry down other modes of shooting. They are all enjoyable in their turn, but more enjoyable than all is wild shooting. In it alone is there that smack of adventure, of wandering, of

novelty, which, to my mind, constitutes the cream of all sport. When you start in the morning you do not know what the day may bring forth. You cannot estimate the probable number of your bag or even its probable quality. It may be very small indeed, or it may by some stroke of fortune be very large. All is delightful uncertainty.

I well remember the first day's real wild shooting I had. It was not long after leaving school; and when I received an invitation to spend a few days one December with a friend who lived in one of the fertile Welsh valleys, and a promise of sport in abundance if I knew how to hold a gun straight, I greedily accepted it.

"The shades of night were falling fast" as I drove up the long steep hill and gained the crest of the valley in whose wooded depths lay Pentrelyn Hall. The snow was falling lightly and slowly, and there was a sharpish frost. I knew that this would probably bring the wildfowl to the river, which flowed through the valley beneath me in long stretches of grey and white, glimmering in the light of the moon, which was just rising over the serrated edge of the pine wood on the top of the opposite hill. Soon I entered the drive, from the trees on either side of which several wood-pigeons darted, startled at the noise of the wheels on

the gravel. A blaze of light from the open hall door, a hearty welcome from my host, and a good dinner were all most comfortable and proper things.

After dinner Mr. H— took me to what he called his study—save the mark! Here we were soon lost in the mysteries of guns and ammunition. "These," said Mr. H—, "are the very best things I have ever shot with," pointing to some gun-cotton cartridges, then lately invented. "They shoot with such little noise, they do not foul the barrel, and they will kill a good five yards further than gunpowder. I have just invested in a thousand of them. You will see what they can do to-morrow."

Now, I had heard but indifferent reports of these gun-cotton cartridges, so I said,

"Have you used many of them?"

"No, only about a dozen; I tried them at the rabbits this morning, but I am quite satisfied they are the best things out. Would you like to try them?"

"No, thanks; I will stick to my own powder cartridges."

We went out on to the drive. The snow had ceased, and the moon shone clearly and brightly.

"Would you like some shooting to-night?" said my host.

"Yes, if you can give me any; but what can I shoot now?"

"Wood-pigeons, in the coppice yonder. They want thinning sadly. My tenants are complaining of the mischief they and the rabbits do. Now, if you take your gun and go quietly under the trees, you will see the pigeons roosting in the topmost branches, and you can make an easy pot shot. You may possibly kill three or four. I would come with you, but I have some letters to write."

Nothing loth, I started off across the paddock to the wood. It was composed of larch and fir-trees which grew rather wide apart, and permitted a good view aloft among the branches. The first thing that caught my eye was a pheasant roosting on a low branch. My fingers itched to pull the trigger, but I nobly refrained. It may be asked, if I could shoot wood-pigeons while they were asleep, why not a pheasant? The answer is, that wood-pigeons are so wary and difficult to approach in the daytime, that it is almost impossible to get a shot at them, except by lying in wait for them at certain times, so that when it is wished to kill them it is no mean advantage to take to surprise them while roosting. Even then the chances are many in their favour. The trees are high, and the branches are thick. The slightest noise alarms them;

and of course, when one is fired at, the others take the hint and scuttle away from the immediate neighbourhood. The pheasant, on the other hand, is an easy shot at all times, and shooting him on his perch is nothing less than butchery. There is no sport in killing *ferœ naturœ* unless some "law" is given them. Although I take the trouble to give this explanation, I do not expect anybody who is not a sportsman to agree with me in my reasoning. Certainly not Mr. Freeman.

In the wood such a solemn silence and stillness reigned. There was no breeze to awaken the sighing of the branches. Even the aspen, had it been there and in leaf, would not have trembled. Carefully avoiding the brambles and rabbit-holes, I picked my way to a tree stump, on which I sat and looked about me. Before long I made out a dark lump in the top of a tree close to, which I knew to be a pigeon; but the quiet was so great and deep, that I hardly felt inclined to break it. I sat still and listened, like men do listen when alone at night in the country, though what one expects to hear I do not know. I listened with ears strained to catch the slightest sound. Oh, Jupiter—Jehoshaphat! What was that? A sudden and prolonged shriek, that sent the blood curdling in my veins, and made my scalp and back "creep" and my

fingers tighten on the gun barrel. A white shape flits between the tree stems. It is an owl on the look out for his breakfast, and the noise that startled me proceeded from his downy throat.

He had broken the spell that was creeping over me, and, taking aim at the ring-dove, I fired. A hundred echoes awoke the silence, and, as the bird slowly fell from branch to branch ere it reached the ground, scores of its fellows left their roosting-places in hurried and noisy flight. Ere I left the wood I killed two more.

At daybreak we made our way to a spring in a glade of an oak plantation by the river. This, we guessed, the frost would not have touched, and we expected the wild ducks would have found it out. We were not disappointed. Ere we reached it we heard them quacking and spluttering in the shallow rivulet. They rose as we came within shot,—three couples of them. Two ducks fell to our shots—one to each—a fine drake with glossy plumage and beautifully tinted neck to my barrel, and a duck to H—'s. "A good beginning," said H—; "now, as you are the youngest, you take the top of that bank, and I will take the bottom, and we will walk along and pick up whatever we can." We did so, the dogs, a spaniel and a retriever, keeping to heel. Ere we had gone many yards

a rabbit popped out of a bramble bush just under my feet. In my hurry I missed him.

"Now, see how I shall 'wipe your eye,'" said H—, and, taking a deliberate aim, he fired. To my delight, his gun went off with a sort of puff instead of a report, and the shots were just ejected a few feet from the barrel and pattered on the grass. Bunny gave a flick of his white tail, and dived unhurt into a burrow. "Ha! ha!" laughed I, "how about wiping my eye, and those excellent gun-cotton cartridges?"

H— looked rather discomposed, but his faith in them was not shaken. The same thing, however, occurring three or four times again in the course of the day, he was compelled to admit that, although gun-cotton sometimes gave very satisfactory results, yet it was not to be depended upon like gunpowder. After knocking over one or two more rabbits, we walked down to the river side. A water-hen, disturbed by our approach, flew up stream, her legs skimming the water in the awkward way peculiar to waterfowl when they take to flight. I fired, and she dropped into the water, evidently winged, and swam underneath a clump of bushes that projected into the stream. I went up to this clump, and climbed out upon it for the purpose of dislodging the wounded bird. To my surprise, one

water-hen after another fluttered away, until nearly a dozen had escaped. They appeared to have made it a sort of harbour of refuge, for I certainly never saw so many collected together before. Unlike coots, water-hens are not gregarious even in severe winter weather. We shot three of them, for a water-hen properly cooked, and *skinned* instead of being plucked, is quite a dainty morsel.

Passing through an oak covert, a brace of pheasants was added to our bag, which by this time was becoming rather heavy. Then we came to a weir, on the edge of which, half-way across, was a small island. From this island a couple of wild ducks took wing, and went away out of shot. Presently we saw them wheel around and come back, but at a great height. H— took the No. 5 cartridge out of his right-hand barrel, and replaced it with one filled with No. 1 shot. Just as the ducks came overhead he fired. One of them, great as the distance was, came down with its wing broken.

"That is the fourth time in succession that you have fired off that right-hand barrel of yours. You will wear it out before the other."

"It's good stuff—it won't wear out; but all the same it is a bad habit to fire one barrel oftener than the other. You see, the trigger of this barrel comes first

to the finger, and when only one barrel is fired off, ten to one it is the right-hand one."

Meanwhile, the duck had fallen into the river and floated down to the island. It became a difficult matter to retrieve it, for the water flowed swiftly over the weir on to a nasty jumble of rocks below, and, if we sent the retriever across, he would probably be carried over and hurt. Rather than let a wounded bird escape to pine away in agony, I determined to retrieve it myself. I had on a pair of wading boots reaching up to the thigh; and as the water was only about nine inches deep on the wooden sill of the weir, I thought I might get across in safety. I had, however, miscalculated the strength of the current, which had such a hold on the wide and buoyant boots, that I was nearly carried off my legs at the first attempt. I had to lean against the stream in order to keep my feet, and before I was half-way across a sudden slip took me in deeper. The water rushed in over the tops of the boots, and poured down my legs in an icy cold deluge. It, however, answered the purpose of taking in ballast and steadying me in my further progress. The duck was recovered, and rather than lie on my back and hoist my legs in the air, to let the water run out, as suggested by H—, I made my way to a neighbouring farm-house, and sending to the hall for a pair of boots, I made myself comfortable.

A marshy tract along the river's side was the next place we visited. Here there was an abundance of snipe, and several of them were added to our bag. My practice at them was so bad, that H— laughed at me heartily, and attributed it to the whiskey I had imbibed, to keep the cold away after my wetting. I need not tell the reader that it was nothing of the kind. I was simply not used to snipe shooting, and the eccentric flight of the birds was, to say the least, bewildering to a young hand. A heron sailed majestically away from a dyke, but we refrained from shooting at it, as it would have been no use to us, and we both had a horror of needless slaughter. Leaving the marshes, we made our way to a mill, H— saying,

"My land ends here; and, although the good fellow at the mill yonder wouldn't mind our going over his meadows, I always make a point of asking leave. We will leave him a couple of rabbits."

Leave was of course given. As we were turning away, I saw a fine pike lying motionless along the edge of the weeds in the millpool. H— said, "We will do the miller a service, and rid him of the destroyer of his ducks. I have heard that you should always fire at the tail of a fish, and not at the head. It deprives him of the power of motion at once. Let us try the experiment."

He fired (again the right-hand barrel, by the way); but apparently the tail was not the vulnerable point of this particular pike, for a wave of water travelling with lightning rapidity up the pool showed us that his means of locomotion were unimpaired.

"Humph! So much the worse for the miller's ducks."

A tramp over two or three meadows brought us a brace and a half of partridges, and to the foot of the hill. Up the side of the hill ran a sort of marshy ravine containing a thicket of dwarf bushes. As soon as the dogs were in, a woodcock floated out with that peculiar owl-like flight they sometimes assume. He paid the penalty of his rashness, as did two others which we flushed. Three more arose, but got clear away; and then, as nothing more remained in the thicket, we turned our attention to the hillside and the rabbits. The snow had melted away in the bright rays of the sun, which shone out of a cloudless sky, and the short grass was as slippery as glass. It was owing to this circumstance, and our consequent ludicrous slipping about and breakneck tumbles, that the rabbits escaped more easily than we wished. Worse even than this was a part of the hill, covered thickly with blackberry bushes and thorns, and with a surface of loose stones. These stones gave way beneath us, and shot us into the

midst of the thorns, so often and so painfully, that plentiful as the rabbits were, we voted the grapes sour, and turned our steps homeward, walking along the high road for some little distance, and then at my request turning down to the river again. I always like walking by the side of water when it is practicable. It shortens the way very considerably, although I cannot quite analyse the charm it has for me. As soon as we reached the river's bank, a solitary teal arose and fell to H—'s shot. Almost simultaneously I fired at and killed a snipe, which took wing from a neighbouring ditch. Refore we reached home two or three rabbits ended their existence, and H— succeeded at last in "wiping my eye" by killing a hare I had missed as it bounded over the furrows.

Only one other incident occurred before we reached home. That was the sight of a fox stealing cautiously along one side of a hedgerow towards a rabbit sitting unsuspiciously on the other. He looked so handsome, with his fur gleaming in the sunlight, that I was sorely tempted to shoot him for the purpose of having him stuffed; but I am happy to tell my fox-hunting readers that virtue was too strongly planted in my heart, and I refrained.

Not the least enjoyable part of a day's shooting or fishing is the return home to the cheerful fireside

and the well-cooked dinner, the happy chat over the after-dinner pipe, and the comfortable feeling that our rest is well earned.

Of course wild shooting varies in character according to place, but I think the foregoing is a pretty fair sample of it. Whether I have made my readers feel as I do about it I do not know, but any way the recital of one day's experience makes me long rather overmuch for more such days.

SPORT INDEED!

THE YELLOW WAGTAIL.

VII.

SPRING

SHE has come in the steps of the warm southern breeze,
Joyously greeting the hungering land;
And the life that was hid in the winterly leas
Suddenly heareth her royal command.
The throstle sings loud 'mid the aspen's quiver,
The swallow skims swift o'er the sighing river.

All the trees in the greenness of leaves she has drest;
Hedges are white with the flowering may,
And each bank wears the primrose's gold on its breast.
Down in the vale at the close of the day,
The reed-wren's low song through the rushes shrilleth,
The nightingale under the moonbeams trilleth.

On the hills, in the glens, by the rills and the streams,
"Spring has come!" nature cries, laughing with joy.
On a thousand new tints see the sunlight now gleams,
Over all light zephyrs playfully toy;
The brooks in their glee are a welcome singing,
That chimes with the chant through the blithe woods
ringing.

In the sky, like a speck 'gainst the fleecy spring blue,
Merrily carols the lark to his fair;
As the melody falls with the freshness of dew,
Jaded hearts drink it in, casting out care.
The doves in the firs to their mates are cooing;
Life's joy was never so worth pursuing.

VIII.

THE TENCH POOL

No part of England is so dear to me as that which lies along the borders of North Wales. On the east stretches the broad and level plain, with the Severn winding mazily through it, loth to leave its fertile fields and luxuriant woods. On the west are at first the lower hills; but wild and picturesque enough in spite of their puny height; and beyond, the grand and rugged mountains, with cloud shadows creeping up their sides, giving an infinite variety to their sober tints of brown and grey and purple; and the clouds themselves rest on their tops, shrouding them from our ken, and seeming to isolate them completely from the world below. It was our practice to make for the hills in all our sporting rambles. We seemed freer and lighter in spirit up there than down on the

flats, shut in by high hedgerows and stern fences. Better was it by far on the uplands, with nothing to stay the breeze that gave us elasticity of limb and freedom of breath. What was there in the lowlands to compensate us for the wide map of landscape below us, with dark forest patches and kaleidoscopic effects of sunshine and shade on the bright greens and golds of meadows and corn lands, and the sudden whitening of the leaves in the near woods as the breeze swept by?

Out of the rich plain, too, rose the Wrekin, proud in its solitary majesty, with the noble river laving its foot, and hundreds of the bravest lads and fairest lasses in all England gazing towards its bold bluff as they give utterance to the time-honoured sentiment "To all friends around the Wrekin." What more glorious than to see the sun rise to the left of the Stiperstones—first a band of pale orange, then a stripe of delicate green that lifted higher and narrowed as the venerable orb rose in full glory, throwing into sudden and distinct relief church spires, white cottages, and shivering poplars! Awakening, too, with a gladness that the night is over, the birds burst out into a deafening chorus that loses much of its charm and sweetness, as the fields, which were silver-white with the gossamer weavings of the night,

resume their pristine hue, and the regular business of the world begins. But I think we felt a deeper delight in the sunsets over the Welsh mountains. Rugged rocks were ruby stepping-stones to the far-off crimson glare, that looked like the gates of fairy-land at the head of the glen, lighting up tarn and stream with an unearthly lustre, while the bare outlines of the hills were toned down by the radiant evening mists in a manner that would have delighted Turner and all his school.

But where is all this leading? Why, to another fishing sketch; but you must let me approach it in my own way. I have told you of the pool on the hill where the big carp lie. Now, I want you to come with me to another pool, not far from that, but nearer the lowlands, where we catch fish that used to have more fascination for me than perhaps any other—the mud-loving tench.

At one time we visited that pool almost daily. Sometimes we would start at five in the morning, and be back by school time. One night, I remember, I had been kept awake by a most racking toothache; losing all patience with the malady, as soon as it was light I dressed, and, taking my rod, set off on that raw, damp morning, tench fishing. It was too much trouble for one of us to call the other up, so we arranged

a code of signals, by means of stones placed on a certain gate, to tell who had passed that way. But most frequently we went in the evenings. Unlike the carp pool, we could not count upon having it all to ourselves, and it was sometimes a regular race which should first seize on the best places. It was a nearly circular pool of considerable extent, and, like the carp pond, surrounded by wood; not, however, dark fir trees, but massy oaks, with open spaces, where grew the "silver birk." There was a narrow pathway all around, but between that and the water's edge was the great beauty of the spot—a belt of luxuriant rhododendron bushes, which at the time of year the tench bit best were one mass of pink blossoms, relieved here and there with white. It was a singularly pretty scene, with the circle of blue sky and white cloud overhead, the circle of green oak foliage below it, with its uniformity broken by tall pine trees peering above it and piercing the blue, then the pink and white of the rhododendrons, and all the details of the picture, repeated in the circular mirror of the lakelet. Bottom fishing is prosy enough, but in such a scene it has a borrowed fascination. What could be jollier for a dreamy lad than to sit on a bank that was a perfect bed of flowers—blue violets, yellow primroses, and wild hyacinths—sleepily watching the float resting so

innocently on the still water, glancing at the rabbits frisking in the glades of the wood, the creeper actively flitting up the lichened tree trunk, and listening to the hum of the insects dancing in the lanes of green light that stream between the tree-tops from the outer glare?

But, see, the game has begun. One of the half-dozen lads who have wormed their way in among the rhododendrons has landed a fine tench. You see to your worm, and let it sink gently down by the flood-gate in an open space between the lily leaves. You watch it intently for a few minutes; but the attention is distracted by a furry little water-rat swimming along by the edge of the bank. How quietly, and yet quickly, it gets along! With an Englishman's instinct, you seize a stick and raise it with a murderous intent, for the little creature is within arm's reach; but pity asserts her sway, and the rat is allowed to visit in peace his wife and family. But the float is bobbing up and down. There! it rises slowly, and at last reclines quietly on its side. That is a sure indication of a tench, and you strike. What a determined way your victim has of boring down into the mud but you are too much for him, and without any splash he is safely landed—a curly-finned, muscular-backed fish of three-quarters of a pound in weight. As the

evening closes in the bites become more numerous, and the float is taken down or off with more of the perch's rush. At last it is too dark to see the bites, and a piece of white paper is fixed to the float to make it more conspicuous. When that is of no avail the line is shortened, and you fish by feel. The spirit of rivalry that erewhile prevailed among us, leading to frequent cautionings not to make any noise or splash the water, for fear of spoiling sport, has given way under the influence of success to careless laughter and fun as fish after fish is lost in the long and dew-wet grass, or falls back into the water after a hasty strike. At last it is positively impossible to fish any longer. Some hooks have been lost in the weeds, which it was not light enough to avoid; and one (I will not say who) is not astonished that he has had no bites for the last ten minutes when he discovers his hook in his coat sleeve instead of in the water.

Then there was the walk home, blundering through the wood and stumbling over fallen branches. We held on to each other for support; but, in truth, it was the blind leading the blind. However, there is comfort in companionship, even if it is all in a heap at the bottom of a ditch.

Uneventful as such an evening may be, yet the memory thereof is passing sweet. Well-earned suc-

cesses and triumphs leave their mark for a time; but there is ever something of pain mingled with them. These quiet enjoyments are bright resting-places in a man's life, whereon he loves to ponder. They come back sometimes so vividly, that one strives to grasp and secure them for ever. Moved by such an impulse, I have seated myself down and fixed a memory brought up by a chance allusion.

IX.

WATCHING FOR WILD DUCKS

No sort of shooting has such enthusiastic votaries as wildfowl shooting, or followers who will take so much trouble and undergo so much privation and inconvenience. Perhaps the cause of this is that the human mind has an irresistible hankering after what is difficult, and a pleasure in overcoming difficulty for the sake of overcoming alone. For my part, although I am extremely fond of wildfowl shooting, I cannot seriously argue that the amount of pleasure gained—putting aside the feeling just alluded to—in any way compensates for the discomforts attending its pursuit, yet I always pursue it when I have the chance, and would uphold the sport most strenuously were I able to do so. Of course there are many modes of

getting at wildfowl, but perhaps the most seductive is watching for the ducks at night as they come to some favourite feeding-place. To do this the night should be clear and starlit enough to enable you to see the ducks against the sky or water. Moonlit nights are not so favourable. A north-east wind and a keen frost are also most useful aids. Of course one must be well hidden from the birds, their powers of sight being very great. Sometimes a tub is sunk in the ground on the edge of the pool or marsh where the ducks assemble, and if this be partly filled with dry straw the shooter may keep himself tolerably warm as he lies ensconced in it. It is seldom, however, that such a shelter has been prepared beforehand, and more frequently the driest ditch one can find has to be chosen. But, whenever it is possible, a boat should be used. The following short sketch will, I think, give the reader a fair idea of what watching for wildfowl really is.

It was one New Year's Eve. The winter had been very mild and open up to Christmas Day, and then a heavy fall of snow occurred, followed by a sharp frost, which brought the wildfowl down from the moors and mountain tarns to the more sheltered river, the greater part of which was free from ice. The day had been clear and cloudless; there was a light breeze

from the north-cast, and for the first time during the winter did there seem a prospect of getting some wildfowl shooting. Accordingly, Jack and I had arranged to start about eight o'clock to an unfrequented part of the river, and we had sent a man on with the punt up the river, to leave it in readiness for us when we arrived at the spot.

After dinner, when we had joined the ladies, and one of them began to sing one of those charming old Scotch ballads, which in their simplicity are ten times prettier and sweeter than the run of modern music, I did not feel so ready to turn out in the cold as I could have wished. Indeed, I had a sort of half hope that Jack would feel equally loth to leave the comfortable drawing-room ; and I resolved, if *he* did not mention it, to be careful not to draw his attention to our proposed shooting excursion. He was too keen a sportsman, however, to let an opportunity slip, and, just as I thought he had forgotten all about it, he said,

"Now, old fellow, time's up. It is no use your making yourself comfortable in that easy chair. You have got to change your dress, you know."

"It isn't eight o'clock yet," I pleaded.

"We must be there by eight o'clock, or we shall miss the flight."

"Flight of what? Where are you going, Jack?" asked his sister.

"Wild ducks—shooting," said he, answering both her questions in the laconic and scarcely polite tone which brothers often adopt in speaking to their sisters.

"But you promised to play bezique with me," said Miss Clara in a reproachful tone.

"Ten thousand pardons, but I am afraid Jack can claim a prior promise;" and I unwillingly left the room with him, to dress more suitably for the occasion.

I had been loth to leave the drawing-room, but when we got out into the keen, frosty air my spirits rose, and the instinct of the sportsman began to thrill through me, infusing its own peculiar pleasure. The snow lay deep on the ground, and muffled the sound of our footsteps. We took a short cut through the wood, where, however, it was so dark that we could scarcely find our way along the numerous rides. Startled by the cracking of the rotten branches underfoot, the ringdoves left their roosting-places in the fir trees, and shook down showers of snow from the laden branches. Leaving the wood, we crossed a meadow and took the path by the river's side for nearly a mile. A sudden plunge of some

heavy body into the water close by attracted our attention.

"What was that?"

"An otter, I expect. If you see him, let fly at him."

The otter, however, had disappeared, but on the margin we found the remains of a fine trout. Master otter must have been hungry, for the fish was nearly all devoured, instead of only the dainty part on the shoulder, known as the otter's bite.

"Are there many of those gentry about here?"

"Yes, too many, unfortunately. We had a pack of otter hounds here not long ago; they started two otters, but killed neither. The master of the hounds was nearly drowned. He attempted to jump a narrow part of the river by means of his spear, using it as a leaping pole, but the end of it jammed in between some rocks at the bottom, and he was checked in mid air, and of course fell in. He was carried by the force of the stream into deep water, and, not being able to swim, he had a near squeak for it. Here is the place where we are to shoot. I wonder where the boat is! Can you see it?"

"No; your man has either hidden it very carefully, or it has been taken away."

"Ah, here it is, underneath this bush. Be careful

how you step in. You take the guns, and I'll paddle her up."

The boat was a shallow, square-ended punt. It was impelled either by a pole—what the Norfolk people call a "quant"—or by a paddle. The latter was like a shovel in shape, with a long handle, and used in this manner: the paddler sits in the stern and takes long strokes on which side of the boat he prefers, letting the paddle drag a little in the water at the end of each stroke, in order to counteract the natural tendency of the boat to turn to the opposite side to that on which the paddle is worked. We soon reached our position, which was a clump of bushes and flags. Making the boat fast, stem and stern, we sat down to wait patiently until the birds began to arrive. It is needless to say we had a retriever with us, as, owing to the current, the ducks might get lost if left until the morning before being picked up, as may be done if the sport is pursued on a pool or mere. At the spot we were stationed the river took a great curve, the part enclosed by which was mostly inaccessible marsh. Our hiding-place was at the broadest part of the river, in the centre of the curve, so that before us across the stream, and to the right and left, up and down, we had a tolerably large expanse of water on which the ducks were expected to alight first.

The current was slow, but there were eddies and under-currents which prevented its freezing, and made the water flow and well up in a mysterious way.

There was time for a pipe; and as we smoked we watched the sky and the water. The sky was cloudless, and the stars shone out with that vivid brilliancy peculiar to frosty nights. The wind blew across the river, but the ripples raised were not sufficient to prevent our seeing anything on its surface. The only sounds audible were the lapping of the water along the stones of the further bank, the gurgle of an eddy suddenly waking up from its giddy, silent whirl into a bubble and boil, and relapsing into quietude again, and the occasional note of a bird. Presently I felt Nero, who was lying against my leg, start up, and I saw some object swimming across the stream towards us. "It was only a water-hen, Nero, so lie down again, good dog."

My legs were getting cramped, so I stood up in the boat to stretch myself. A couple of ducks arose from the marsh behind, and made away with a great splutter.

"How the dickens did they come there? I did not see them come."

"We must keep a better look out. Sit down and put your pipe out."

"It must be nearly nine o'clock. Hist! here they are."

Three dark bodies shot into view against the sky, disappeared for a moment against the dark background of the opposite bank, and then made three distinct splashes in the water.

Bang! bang! went the guns, and two of the ducks lay on their backs quite dead. The other rose, but was dropped before he had got far. Nero easily and quickly retrieved all three, and scarcely had he done so ere he had to go into the cold water again for a fourth duck, which came by itself, and hovered for a second right over us.

"I say, can't we stop this dog shaking himself in the boat? I shall be wet through, directly."

"No; he can't do without his shake. Bear it philos—missed, by Jupiter!"

He had fired at a duck which was passing overhead and behind him, and therefore had a very good chance of getting off unhurt.

"Hark! hark! I believe that was the call of wild geese. My man says he saw some on the hills. There! look! don't you see them, over the trees?"

I certainly thought I saw some large dark bodies passing at a great distance. They might have been wild geese, but they did not come close enough to

enable us to decide the point. A considerable time elapsed without the appearance of any more ducks. Then a flock of curlews passed overhead, at a very great height, making the air resound with their cries. A heron flapped along down the river, just above the surface of the water, evidently looking out for a place to settle. Then a couple of teal came within shot, but one only was secured. Then another duck, and then it really seemed as if no more were coming. It must be remembered that one cannot obtain a very large bag at this sort of sport, except on preserved waters, and we considered we had done very well indeed when three more wild ducks were added to the heap in the bottom of the boat—which certainly had not much right to the name of "bag" (although in sporting parlance it would be called so), seeing that there was nothing in the shape of a bag anywhere near.

It was now getting late, the cherry brandy was nearly finished, and the cold was every minute becoming more unbearable. Still, we did not like to leave the spot while there was a chance of any more ducks coming. The chance was but slight, as it was so late, but it wanted only a quarter of an hour to twelve o'clock, and we resolved to see the old year out and the new year in before we left.

Even to the most thoughtless it is a solemn time

when the old year passes away, with its load of varied experience of joy or sorrow, and the new year comes in, fresh and unsullied, waiting for us to use it as we will. Don't be afraid, dear reader, that I am going to moralize. I write now more to amuse than to instruct, and serious thoughts are out of place; but is it to be wondered at that we neither of us spoke the while the last moments of the old year died away in the silence and stillness of the starlit night? The thoughts of each were busy with his own concerns, and he forebore to interrupt the other. There was a soughing of the water in the eddies, a sighing of the wind over the rushes, a wailing of curlews in the upper sky, and the new year was upon us.

"A happy new year to you, old man! We had better be going home."

May each year be a happy new year to all honest men and good sportsmen!

X.

A DOG HUNT ON THE BERWYNS

THANKS to the columns of the sporting papers, every Englishman, whatever his occupation, is sufficiently familiar with the details of fox-hunting and the other kinds of hunting usually practised in merry England; but few, I fancy, have either seen or heard of a dog-hunt. It has fallen to my lot to participate in such a hunt—one, too, which was quite as exciting as a wolf-hunt must have been in the olden time, or as that most glorious of sports, otter-hunting, is now. Imagine to yourself a three days' chase after a fierce and savage dog, a confirmed sheep-worrier, and that in the midst of the picturesque ruggedness and grandeur of the Welsh hills.

Some three or four miles east from Bala, the Berwyn mountains raise their heathery summits in the midst

THE BERWYNS.

of a solitude broken only by the plaintive bleat of a lost sheep, or the shouts of men in search of it. For miles the purple moorland rolls on without a moving creature to break the stillness. Deep ravines run down on either hand through green, ferny sheep-walks, dotted with innumerable sheep. These ravines in winter time, when the snow lies deep on the hills, are, when not frost bound, roaring torrents. In the summer huge blocks of stone are scattered about in strange confusion, and a tiny stream can scarcely find its way between them. Lower down still can be seen, here and there, a farmhouse, in some sheltered glen kept green all the year round by the trickling moisture. Further off still, in the valleys, are villages and hamlets tenanted by hardy Welsh sheep-farmers and dealers.

In the least-exposed corners of the sheep-walks are folds built of loose, unmortared stones, in which the sheep huddle to find shelter from the fury of the frequent storms which sweep over the mountains.

As the wealth of the hill farmers consists chiefly of sheep, if a dog once takes to worrying them, it is either kept in durance vile, or killed. The habit once acquired is never got rid of; and after a sheep-dog has once tasted blood, it becomes practically useless to its owner. The quantity of sheep that can be

killed by such a dog in a short time is almost incredible.

It may be imagined, therefore, with what feelings the Berwyn farmers heard of sheep after sheep being killed on their own and neighbouring farms, by a dog which nobody owned, and which ran loose on the mountains, catering for itself. Descending from the lonelier part of the hills, it would visit the sheep-walks and kill, as it appeared, for the pure love of killing, in most cases leaving the mangled bodies on the spot.

Month after month ran by, and it still eluded the vengeance of the indignant hillmen. The most exaggerated accounts were current respecting its size and ferocity. No two versions agreed as to its colour, though all gave it enormous size. As it afterwards turned out, it was a black-and-white foxhound bitch.

Everybody carried a gun; but, on the few occasions that the dog came within shot, it appeared to be shot proof. The loss of numerous sheep was becoming serious; in some instances the farmers suffered heavily. It was the staple topic of conversation. From time to time paragraphs such as the following appeared in the papers published in the neighbouring towns:—

"The Rapacious Dog.—The noted sheep-destroyer on the Berwyn hills still continues to commit his

depredations, in spite of all efforts to kill him. The last that was seen of him was on Sunday morning, by Mr. Jones, on the Syria sheep-walk, when the dog was in the act of killing a lamb. Mr. Jones was armed with a gun at the time, and tried to get within gunshot range; but it seems that the animal can scent a man approaching him from a long distance, so he made off immediately. After it became known to the farmers and inhabitants of Llandrillo that he had been seen, a large party went up to the mountain at once, and were on the hills all day; but nothing more was heard of him till late in the evening, when he was again seen on Hendwr sheep-walk, and again entirely lost. On Monday a number of foxhounds were expected from Tanybwlch, and, if a sight of him can be obtained, no doubt he will be hunted down and captured, and receive what he is fully entitled to—capital punishment."

On a bright May morning, five months after the first appearance of the sheep-destroyer, a pack, consisting of a dozen couples of fox-dogs, with their huntsman, started up the lane from Llandderfel to the hills, followed by a motley crowd of farmers and labourers, armed with guns and sticks, and numbering many horsemen among them.

Up the lane till the hedges gave place to loose stone

walls, higher still, till the stone walls disappeared, and the lane became a track, and then a lad came leaping down the hill, almost breathless, with the news that the dog had been seen on a hill some six miles away.

Up the mountain, down the other side, up hill after hill, following the sheep-tracks, the cavalcade proceeded, until we reached the spot where our quarry had been last seen. A line of beaters was formed across the bottom of a glen, and proceeded up the hill. Up above was Dolydd Ceroig, the source of the Ceriog, which came through a rent in the moorland above.

A wilder scene could not be imagined. On either side the hills rose up, until their peaks were sharply defined against the blue. The steep sides were covered with gorse and fern, with fantastic forms of rock peering through. At the bottom the infant Ceriog eddied and rushed over and among rocks of every shape and size, forming the most picturesque waterfalls. In front, up the ravine, the numerous cascades leaped and glittered, growing smaller and smaller, until the purple belt of moorland was reached.

The hounds quartered to and fro, and the men shouted in Welsh and English. The hardy Welsh horses picked their way unerringly over the débris.

"Yonder he is," was the cry, as up sprang the chase a hundred yards ahead. From stone to stone, from

crag to crag, through the water, through the furze and fern, fled the dog, and the foxhounds, catching sight and scent, followed fast. At first they gained; but when the pursued dog found it was terrible earnest for her, she laid herself well to her work, running silently without a single yelp.

Startled by the unusual noise, the paired grouse flew whirring away. The sheep were scattered in confusion, and a raven flew slowly away from a carcase. Upward still we went, the footmen having the best of it on the uneven ground.

> "Upward still, to wilder, lonelier regions,
> Where the patient river fills its urn
> From the oozy moorlands, 'mid the boulders,
> Cushioned deep in moss, and fringed with fern."

Now the hounds are over the crest, and soon we followed them. We now had the bogs to contend with, worse enemies than the rocks.

"Diawl! John Jones, I am fast," we heard, and saw an unfortunate pony up to its belly in the bog. Another stumbles in a crevice, and sends its rider headlong. We footmen have still the best of it, although it is no easy matter to run through the heather.

We had now reached the other side of the mountain, and were fast descending into the valley of the Dee. There seemed a probability of our catching the quarry

here; but no, she left the heather—much to my relief, it must be confessed—and made for the valley, past a farm; now well in advance of her pursuers; over the meadows; then, for a short distance, along the Bala and Corwen line. Then past Cynwyd village, where the crowd of people, and the various missiles sent after her, failed to stop her. Then through the churchyard, and along the road for some distance.

Here a man breaking stones hurled his hammer at her, but missed her.

Turning again, she made for the hills, running with unabated speed, although she had been hunted for nearly ten miles. The original pursuers had melted away, but we were reinforced by numbers of others.

Here I obtained a pony, and set off again.

By this time the hounds were in full cry up the hillside. Mile after mile, over the hills we followed, now only by scent, as the dog had made good use of her time, while the hounds were hampered by people crossing the scent at the village.

Night was rapidly coming on as we reached a brook flowing from the moorland. Here the scent was lost, and the wild dog was nowhere to be seen. We held a council of war as to what was to be done. I was the only horseman present at first, but by-and-by the huntsman and others came up, bog-

besmeared, and in a vicious frame of mind. We looked a queer group, as we sat in the light of some dead fern that had been kindled. Some were sitting on stones; others kneeling down, drinking from the brook; some whipping the tired dogs in, and others gesticulating wildly.

One thing was evident—nothing more could be done that evening; and the hounds were taken to their temporary home, to rest all the morrow, and resume the hunt the day after.

On the morrow, from earliest dawn, messengers were coursing the glens in all directions, with invitations to people far and near to come and assist in the hunt. For myself, I was glad to rest my tired limbs. Although pretty well used to mountain work, I was quite done up; still, I resolved to see the end of the fun, and hired another pony.

The day after, the men kept pouring into the place of rendezvous, till I was sure the majestic hills had never before witnessed such an assemblage. From far and near they came. Many, like myself, were mounted upon Welsh ponies. We commenced beating; and the Berwyns rang with the unearthly yells of the crowd. We reached Cader Fronwen, one of the highest of the Berwyns, without meeting with a trace.

Here I was put *hors de combat* by my pony sticking

fast in the bog ; and, as every one was too busy to help me, there I had to stay, and the hunt swept on. Soon the noise of the beaters died away, and I was left alone, sitting on a stone which peered out of the bog, holding the bridle of my unfortunate steed, and every now and then cutting heather, and pushing it under its belly, to prevent the poor creature sinking any deeper into the mire. "Here's a pretty fix," I thought.

Soon the mist which enveloped the summit of Cader Fronwen came sweeping down the gorge in a torrent of rain ; and, even if my pony had been free, it would have been madness to stray from where I was, as I could not see two yards before me, and I did not know the paths.

By-and-by I heard the huntsmen coming back, and then saw them looming gigantic in the mist. After having extricated my pony, as I was chilled and wet through, I made the best of my way to Llangynog, while the rest of the party—or multitude, rather—made for the Llanrhaiadr hills, but, as I afterwards learnt, without success. Tired with a hard and long day's work, the men separated, and made off for their respective homes. No traces of the dog had been found, although every likely hill had been well scoured.

Some people averred that the devil must be in the dog. The major part of the farmers believed that the

savage animal had been frightened away, and most probably would not be met with again for some time. Acting under this conviction, the hounds were sent back by train the next morning.

The morrow was beautifully fine; and, little expecting I should see the death of the sheep-worrier, I had gone for a ramble over the hills, armed with my geological hammer. I was sitting on a slab in an isolated quarry, watching the varying tints of the hill side, as shadow and sunshine coursed each other over the tender spring green of the grass, the darker green of the new fern, and the warm yellow-brown of the last year's fronds, and admiring the contrast of the grey rocks angrily jutting out amidst the loveliness, and the whole crowned with the purple heather, rising above a narrow belt of mist, when a man, gun in hand, came clinking down the sloping rubbish, digging his heels in at each step, and excitedly told us—the two or three quarrymen and myself—that he had seen the dog lying on a rock about a mile away.

A boy was despatched to summon the neighbouring farmers. In a very short space of time about fifty people were on the spot, armed with guns of every conceivable make and age. Stealthily creeping up the hill, we were sent in different directions, so as to surround the sheep-walk where she lay.

In half an hour's time, a gradually lessening circle was formed, all proceeding as silently as possible, and taking advantage of every tuft of fern or stunted thorn, so as to get as near as possible before arousing the sleeping dog.

There was a distance of about eighty yards between each man, when the brute rose up, and stretched herself, showing her white and glistening fangs.

Uttering a low growl, as she became aware of her position, she set off in a long, swinging gallop towards the heather. Just in that direction there appeared to be a man missing from the cordon, and a wide gap was left, through which it seemed probable she would escape, and a storm of shouts arose. Just, however, as escape seemed certain, a sheet of flame poured out from behind a clump of thorn bushes and ferns, and a loud report went reverberating over the glens. The dog's neck turned red, and she rolled over and over, uttering yelp after yelp in her agony. There was a miscellaneous charge from all sides. Crash came the butt-end of the gun which had shot her on her body with such force, that the stock was splintered. Bang! bang! everybody tried to get a hit at her, even after she was dead. When life was quite extinct, we all gathered together, and a whoop of triumph awoke the echoes, startling the lapwings on the moorland.

As we marched down to the village we fired a volley in token of our success, and cheer after cheer told of the gladness with which it was welcomed by the villagers. The man who fired the lucky shot was carried through the streets of the village on the shoulders of two stout quarrymen, and the whole population gave themselves a holiday and made merry. A subscription was started, and contributed to handsomely, in order to pay for the hounds and other expenses.

Upon examination, the bitch was found to be branded on the left side with the letter "P"; so if any of my readers have lost such a dog, they will know what has become of it.

I do not suppose that a more exciting chase was ever witnessed since the old wolf-hunting days.

The reader may think that a great deal of fuss was made about a small matter, and that the dog might have more easily been secured, but those who know the district will know how easy it would be for a wild animal to evade all pursuit in the solitudes and fastnesses of the hills. A careful stalk might have brought a shooter within shot, but the excitable natures of the Cymry would scarcely be satisfied with such a finale under the circumstances. It must be admitted that the damage done by the dog was suffi-

ciently provocative of excitement, and the desire to avenge their losses to make any trouble in the fulfilment seem small.

It may seem strange to many, as it did to me, that foxhounds should chase one of their own breed, but the fact remains that they did so.*

* The occurrence above related is really a fact, and caused a great deal of excitement in the neighbourhood at the time. My account of it is taken from good authority, and I have since had it confirmed in every particular by eye-witnesses of the hunt. The article first appeared in "London Society," and was copied in the local papers, so that if I had failed in telling the tale as it was told to me, I should soon have met with contradiction. The dog is stuffed, and I believe may be seen at an inn at Llandrillo.—G. C. D.

DOG WORRYING SHEEP.

XI.

VIRNIEWSIDE

VIRNIEWSIDE has seen some of my best remembered wanderings. To me the Virniew is one of the most attractive of rivers. Never, in all its course, so boisterous as its neighbour, the sacred Dee, you are not overwhelmed by the roar with which the latter deadens your angling faculties, and absorbs you in oblivious reverie as you stand gazing at the tumultuously rushing water.

My first acquaintance with it commenced when I was about thirteen years old. A friend and I came upon it at its source, after a toilsome walk over the hills from Bala. It was a terribly hot day. We had lost our way more than once, and had been chevied by a diminutive black bull of exceedingly fierce aspect and savage disposition. After our troubles it was

delicious to come upon the tiny, lucid stream, and follow it down all the way to Llanwddyn, never losing the sound of its cheerful murmur. The inn we stayed at—I forget the name—is endeared to my memory by the excellent provender set before us, and the moderateness of the charges. After our meal we visited the stream, here of a good size, and flowing for some distance through very boggy land. The trout were numerous and large, and, from what I hear, have not deteriorated since. Few people seem to ascend so high, and I believe the place is comparatively free from the crowd of Lancashire anglers, who literally swarm on Virniewside at Easter. It was at this place that an eminent solicitor of my acquaintance went poaching—in all innocence, though, for he was no angler. Perched astride the shoulders of a Welshman who knew the bog, none of his clients would have recognized their staid adviser, as he eagerly watched the operations of a gang of netters sweeping the stream. With his fingers clenched in the red hair of his two-footed steed, our friend tracked the trout to their holes, and was with difficulty restrained from taking a header after a three-pounder that threatened to elude the nets.

From Llanwddyn to Meifod we have twenty miles or more of good trout-water. With this part I am but

little acquainted. Above Meifod the river is increased by the accession of the Banw, by some called the true Virniew. For exactness, I ought here to state that the name of the river is properly spelt "Vyrnwy," but I prefer following the English style, which gives a better idea to a "Sassenach" of the pronunciation. Below Meifod are still some good trout reaches, but the pike are gaining an ascendancy which seriously interferes with the welfare of the red-spotted gentlemen. I heard of a Manchester man taking an enormous number of small jack with the minnow one Easter week. As far as I can see, there are no very large ones.

Above Pontyscowrhyd weir are some excellent deeps and back-waters for pike, and some good ground for wildfowl. A few winters ago I shot a bird here which was wholly new to me, being, I believe, rare so far north. I had to retrieve it myself off some rotten ice, over which I had to crawl at full length. It was a fine specimen of the water-rail. It was here also that a friend of mine got bogged, and had to be hauled out with ropes, minus his wading boots. A little lower down, I once counted more than twenty salmon on one ford, and picked up half as many lying dead on the banks. This is not an uncommon sight on the Virniew. On the first day of the season, and

a few days after this, I saw the river netted for a considerable distance above and below this ford, and not a single fish of any kind was caught. The next fishing station is Llansaintffraid, and for a long way above the weir are deep stretches of water, that just above the mill being particularly deep.

I believe this water holds plenty of pike, though I never had much sport in it myself. The last time I was there, not very recently, the water was dotted with trimmers—quite allowable, perhaps, when the object is to thin the pike and preserve the trout, but, nevertheless, not at all pleasant to any one who carries a trolling rod. From Llansaintffraid to the mouth of the river Tanat I have always had my best sport with the pike. There are two spots where I rarely failed to have a run—one just opposite the first bush going up-stream from, and on the same side as, the Tanat, and just where the deep begins to tail off into a rapid; and the other about eighty yards higher, where some sunken trees project into the stream. It was a little above this last spot that nine of the largest perch I ever saw were caught by a fellow-angler, one bright, hot summer's afternoon, when the water was perfectly clear. The shoal of fish slowly circled round the bait, and cunning Griffith guided the worm accommodatingly to the noses of the largest.

The Tanat is a capital trout stream, but a great part of it is preserved by Sir Watkin Wynn, and can only be fished by ticket. All the way down to Llanymynech the Virniew has holes where the big chub sleep away the lazy day, under the swaying branches of the willows, and shallows where the tender-mouthed grayling hover, and now and then the large Severn trout find their way up, and make glad the heart of some fortunate angler. Below Llanymynech the river retains the same character. The trout are gradually dying out, and the coarse fish reign in their stead. This is much to be regretted; yet it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and it is pleasant to see the numerous bottom-fishers from distant towns, who would never dream of throwing a fly, but who enjoy themselves vastly, sitting under the shade of the willows, and studying intently the movements of their floats as they are influenced by the seductive bite of the chub or the rapid dash of the perch. Pleasant is it to them, and who shall say that it is not as profitable as the more scientific amusement we indulge in? The fords are fewer and more gravelly, and the deeps are longer and muddier, as the Virniew nears the Severn; the pebbles give way to gravel, and the gravel to clayey soil and rich alluvial loam.

While canoeing one summer, I was often seriously

bothered by the clay banks that abound near Melverley, where the rivers join. These banks reach up in steep ledges and pinnacles close to the surface, and the canoe would drive on to one without warning, for they are not easily seen. With deep water before and behind, and perhaps on either side, or, what is worse, tenacious mud, it was a difficult and dangerous job to get free. Many of the labourers in this neighbourhood make a good thing of setting night-lines along the deeps, nominally to catch eels; but of course, if any other fish gets on, it is not thrown back again. I have seen large baskets of fish caught in this manner exposed for sale in Oswestry streets.

When canoeing, I came suddenly upon a man, waist-deep in the water, shovelling the mud out on the bank. In reply to my inquiry, he said he was looking for "lamperns" to bait his eel-lines with.

Between Llanymynech and Melverley is Pentre-heilin Mill, and it was to this place that my last Virniewside ramble was directed. It was a beautiful day, early in the autumn, and, mounted on my bicycle, I threaded the fragrant lanes with the intention of enjoying the holiday and a brisk ride through a pleasant country, that stretched,

> "With all its autumn bowers,
> And crowded farms and lessening towers,"

till it mingled in the distance, not with the "bounding main," but with the blue haze that hid the far-off hills. Alas for the vanity of human wishes! A plague of gnats, which visited the country that year, was then at its height, and into my eyes and nose and mouth they came by hundreds; not pleasant at any time, but doubly unpleasant when steering a bicycle along rutty lanes. At last, fairly blinded, I ran against a heap of stones while descending a steep bank, and had, without doubt, the worst fall it has been my fate to have in all my bicycle experience. Bicycle, basket, rods, and myself all appeared tied up in an inextricable knot. However, I was very little the worse, and the river was reached at last without any further tumbles.

Gudgeons had to be caught for bait, and while catching them I conversed with the miller. He told me that the grayling and trout fishing had fallen off very considerably of late, but that the pike and chub were on the increase. He once killed a seven-pound pike with no less than fourteen samlets and small trout in its maw. In the spring, when the water is high, great numbers of jack ascend the brook Morda (which here flows in) up to the mill, in a vain attempt to get higher.

"We caught a good many with the net a fortnight ago," said the miller.

"With the net? Confound it! have you left any for me?"

"Oh, yes. One I should take to be over ten pounds broke the net and escaped. It was in the third hole below."

I fished carefully down to the hole indicated without a run. The river was low and clear, and the banks were high and wooded. Where the big pike lay there was a slowly-circling eddy, right under some overhanging bushes, whose branches trailed in the water. A difficult place to fish; but, casting with all care, I cleverly pitched the bait, armed with two triangles and a large hook, right into the thick of the branches. Some time was spent in getting clear, and, as I had only two hours to spare, it was, to say the least, annoying—especially as the big fish was doubtless lying snug in his hole witnessing my discomfiture. Some distance below, where the stream flows broad and deep, with a bed of weeds on either side, I had a good run from beneath some floating duckweed. After a sharp fight, I lost a nice fish. The river here makes a sweep round a large field, and doubles back almost upon itself. I walked across the neck of this peninsula, and, casting in the eddy at the confluence of the Morda, had a decided run. It was dusk, and I allowed the fish too much line,

getting him fast in something at the bottom. Laying the rod down, I ran up to the mill, and, impressing a boy into my service, we loosened the punt and drifted down to where the line was fast. With the aid of a pikel I freed it from some sunken branches. The jack was still on, and I soon landed it—a nice little fish of four pounds.

It was then time to go, and the ride back in the cool moonlight was delightful. I halted at the top of a hill to rest, and how solemn and beautiful the night was! All the plain before me was shrouded in mist—an ever-changing shadowy sea, with island trees and copses peering through it. The sky above was clear, and out of the profound silence the moon looked down chilly and clearly upon the earth that was "sleeping off the fever of the day." The weird stillness was only broken at times by the shriek of an owl that was flitting over the meadows, and the churring of a pair of nightjars around an oak. I stayed for a long time, thinking—but what do men think of on such nights? I venture to say that most men's thoughts would run in the same channel as mine; and this is, perhaps, not the place to talk of these times and things.

To sum up; the Virniew is rapidly (save in its upper waters) ceasing to be a trout stream. As a salmon

stream I never had much opinion of it. It has good spawning beds, but few of those haunts where the salmon love to lie and rest. For jack and bottom fishers the river has many attractions, and to them I can heartily recommend its willowy banks.

XII.

APHRODITÉ

The wind that swept along the shore
In one grand pæan died away,
And with the last faint echo of its roar
Far o'er the deep there 'rose the break of day;
The heavy storm-clouds parted right and left,
Red burned the flashes through the rugged cleft.

And then the sun clomb in the sky,
To send a broad'ning crimson track
Across the waves to where the wet sands lie,
A glistening scythe that cuts the bold waves back;
And now and then, with quick'ning interval,
Gleamed through the waves a light most magical.

And now the day was well begun,
The sunrise rays had left the sea,
The shamefaced clouds had fled before the sun,
Of fairest blue the heavenly canopy;
'Twas then a wave that overtopped the rest
Surged on, and bore *the Goddess* on its crest.

She crouched within a monster shell,
Her blue-black hair around her clung,
As shaking off a heaven-created spell,
With sudden motion to her feet she sprung;
And iridescent gleams of green and gold
Flashed from the shell in glories manifold.

Abroad her massy hair she threw,
And bared her white limbs to the day;
With happy wonder in her eyes' deep blue
She glanced around the circle of the bay;
And from the inner chambers of the shell
A sweet Æolian music 'gan to swell.

Then when her shell-car touched the strand
She scanned the fertile valleys o'er,
And, glad at heart, she raised her pink-white hand
And sang, "I love, I love," and evermore
With that sweet song and those sweet words doth ring
The world where Aphrodité seeks her king.

XIII.

BURN FISHING

EVERY trout-fisher knows a spot like that described by a Shropshire clergyman in the following lines:—

"Where round about the mossy stones the glimmering water whirls,
With bubbles making rings of light and strewing shadowy pearls;
Where through the sunlights and the shadows, by the ancient roots,
Under the grey arch fringed with fern, the arrowy ousel shoots,
Where the larches' glorious greenness shines all up the slanting height—
Greenness shining, not a colour, but a tender living light."

And although he may not be able to reproduce in print, for the benefit of others, the impressions that the beauty of earth, wood, water, and sky make upon his mind, or though he may not even care to talk about them, for fear of being accused of "sentiment" (of which most men have a wholesome horror), yet he feels them all the same, and perhaps all the more deeply.

The praises of trout fishing have, goodness knows, been sung often enough, yet there are hundreds for whom the dose cannot be made large enough. With the hope, therefore, of pleasing these, and of bringing to the recollections of the elders of the guild the keen delights and healthy excitements of their younger days, I ask my readers to accompany me on another fishing excursion.

It is a sunshiny afternoon late in April. A few showers in the morning have wakened into life all the myriad forms of animal and insect life that we see about us as we strike into the wood. The singing of the birds is almost deafening. No wonder they put forth all their powers on such a day as this; I, too, feel inclined to burst into song, but am restrained by the knowledge that I have no voice. My vocal powers have been so persistently denied by an otherwise appreciative family, that I do not care to commit myself. Never mind, I can listen. As we wend our way along the mossy glades, the rabbits flit across in numbers, giving a derisive flip of their white tails as they seem to recognize the harmlessness of the fishing rods we carry. Acting on the rule that it is always best when walking along the side of a hill to keep high, we proceed along the crest of the wood and listen to the brawling stream which flows far down on

our left. We catch glimpses of it sometimes through the lacing branches and the "tender, living light" of the fresh spring foliage. We are not going to angle in a river, but a brook, or, more properly, I suppose, a burn, seeing that it is a mountain stream. Here we are, at last, at the path which leads down to it, and a quick run, with a leap or two over fallen logs, brings us to its banks. The rain of the morning has raised the water a little, but has not discoloured it much; the mud soon clears away in a quick running stream. It is in famous order for fly-fishing, though.

It is quite probable that a worm would be as successful as a fly, and could be more easily worked in and out of the crannies, and under the roots and big stones; but, as we aim at being thoroughly sportsmanlike, worm fishing is tabooed, and—we had no time to get good bait before starting. How easy it is to be virtuous when we can't be otherwise! Well! on with your fly—only one. It does not matter much what fly it is, so that it is in season and has a pretty rough body to hide the hook, for sometimes you are constrained for room in burn fishing, and you may not be able to give sufficient life to your fly to induce a trout to run at it without deliberation. Suppose, for instance, you had crept through the underwood to

the tail of a pool to which there was no possible access higher up, and you have to cast up stream, and let the fly float down towards you; then it is very important that it should have the look of a drowning caterpillar, and have its sting well concealed from the spotted gentleman, who sails up to it without hurrying himself, for he knows that it cannot escape him. Then you may have the satisfaction of knowing that in all probability he will not escape you.

Generally speaking, one man is quite enough to fish a small burn; but, if there are two, let them take the pools turn and turn about, which is generally easy enough, if the banks are open, as, owing to the sinuosity of the brook, the pools, though close to each other, are yet not within fish sight. Each hole has a gradually deepening shallow above it, which is usually productive, and this can always be fished without interfering with the tail of the next. After first wetting our casts in the shallow under the wooden bridge, we are ready to begin. Now, it will not do to stand close to the stream unless there is covert; and here there is none. The brook flows through a green, mossy glade for about eighty yards, without a bush on its banks, and in no place more than six inches deep. So crouch down at some distance off, and watch the sparkling water, golden-

brown against the gravel, and by-and-by you will see shadows hovering here and there, which you know to be trout on the feed. As the capture of one will effectually frighten the others in its immediate neighbourhood, you may as well look out for the biggest. There he is, under the lee of the opposite bank. Now, throw just above him. Ah! you have thrown too high, and one of the small fry has darted in, and in an instant is hopping about on the grass. That is a pity; but it cannot be helped, so basket it. We should throw it in again if we were fishing in a river, but we cannot afford to do so here. And now, for a while, we shall have a series of nice pools, from each of which it is easy to pick a trout, or, perhaps, two; but the cream of the sport awaits us further on. For a quarter of a mile the water comes down in a series of small cascades, wildly hurrying over the rocks, and boiling furiously in deep pools under overhanging ledges. On either bank, all the way up, the alders, hazels, and brambles crowd and hang over the deeply-cut channel, forming an impervious barrier to the thin-skinned angler, and meeting overhead in a leafy tunnel, up which we must wade. Ah, how cool the water is! Take care how you make your way over the polished stones: you may easily slip in up to your waist.

There, you've done so already, and nearly broken the top joint of your rod against the rock. You must shorten your cast to about 3 ft., and wind up till the gut touches the top ring. Then pitch your fly against that large, mossy stone that breaks the rush of the water; then, as the fly falls back into the eddy, look out for squalls. There, you've got him, and a nice one, too: but the difficulty is to get him out. You cannot lift your rod, because of the branches overhead; so you let the line run out, and push the rod further up stream, and move up yourself till you come within reach of your captive, who is held, by the help of a good yard of gut and a stiff rod, right under a little cascade, and you insinuate your fingers softly under him, and ladle him out. Risky work, undoubtedly, but all the more pleasant because exciting. There will be a little more room higher up, and you may probably get more than one fish out of each pool. This one is a good half-pounder, and in a certain hole further on you may expect to get one three-quarters, or, if you are extremely lucky, a pound in weight; for the deep holes sometimes shelter uncommonly good fish, and just here are not sufficiently "comeatable" to be cleaned out every summer by the farm lads groping and netting with two pole nets, after the manner of their kind.

The reader must imagine the capture of the succeeding fish for himself. To help his imagination, let him think of the dark, cool water, eddying in and out of the cracks and crannies, boiling over the polished rocks, and splashing the long golden-brown and dark-green moss on the perpendicular rocky sides of the chasm—for such it is—up which we wade; of the graceful ferns and odorous flowers that grow on every ledge, of the drooping branches and pendent wild roses, and, in spite of the deafening noise of the water and the monotone of the insects, of the strange feeling of loneliness and quiet which—— Murder! what's that? Ha! ha! ha! While you were sitting on a stone fastening on another fly (the last was sucked under that root and lost), you were not aware that your head was within a foot of a dipper's nest, and that, just as you were turning your head to seek some fresh beauty to descant upon, its occupant, thinking all was not quite as it ought to be, or alarmed at the idea of a poet being so near her, left her nest with a mighty whirr, brushing your face as she went. Enough to startle anybody, wasn't it? What a 'cute place for a nest, under the edge of the bank, and looking like a magnified wren's; and how effectually that drooping fern conceals it! The five pure white eggs are quite hot, and will soon be hatched. It is late, though,

for the dippers to breed, for I have found their nests early in March; but, perhaps, her first was plundered.

Now we come to the last and best pool of all, and oh! for the skill of—but no! no one's skill could reproduce that picture. The stream, after a wild leap over a ledge, spreads out to some five yards in width, deep at the upper end, but shallowing as it broadens. Through the leafy archway, which there comes suddenly to an end, you see a small meadow bright with flowers, a picturesque farm and mill, and then the hill side, and, beyond and above, the bright, fleecy blue. On either side the wood comes down to the brook, and here and there we see the blue haze of the hyacinths, while through the green roof a marvellous chequer-work of light and shadow falls on the rippling water, and is thrown back in quivering reflections on the rocks and tree stems. To crown the picture, on a projecting branch, and in a patch of sunlight, sits a kingfisher gorgeously attired. But we are fishing, not painting—so silence. There, if that beauty is not within an ounce of a pound, I am much mistaken!

Turn them out on the grass in the open—two dozen! That's what I call good sport for burn fishing, and sport, also, that you will only get in the spring. By-the-by, how *dappled* many of the fish were when they came out of the water; sometimes one whole side

would be light-coloured and the other dark, or maybe the shoulder light and the rest of the body dark, or otherwise curiously varied. This, I suppose, is caused by the fish lying in deep holes, against the stones, and with but a scanty allowance of light. They are beginning to get of a uniform colour now, though.

Over the crest of the hill yonder you come upon boggy land; and, although the brook there is very small, it contains some fair-sized fish of a deep rich colour, and were it not getting late we would take a cast there; but it is time to be turning. When we get to the high road we see two or three anglers who have been fishing in the lower waters of the brook, where the fishing is much easier, though to my mind not so pleasant. That man in a mason's dress with bulging coat pockets, has, ten to one—for I know him of old—been fishing with preserved salmon roe! * Here is a city youth out for a week's fishing in the country. Look at his big basket and bran new rod. Poor fellow! the former is empty, and its owner is downhearted. He probably does not admire burn fishing; we who are successful do.

Burn fishing, however, can only be enjoyed to advantage in the spring. In the summer heavy rains

* It is the most deadly bait known, and its use is prohibited by Act of Parliament, under a penalty of £2.

will bring the fish upon the feed, but as the water is then thick, the worm (or sometimes a small minnow) must be used. Often, too, on hot bright days, when the water is low and clear, a small well-scoured red-worm will take them when nothing else will. Of course one cannot expect the sport in burn fishing that one gets in a river, but nevertheless it is very enjoyable.

A TANGLED SKEIN.

XIV.

LLYN CADWS

A POACHING REMINISCENCE

We were a merry party at Sandmouth—Eva and Winnie Morton, their cousin Carrie Morton, their brother Jack, Mrs. Morton, Tom Seymour and myself, Alec Hinton. We had the most glorious rambles over the Welsh Hills, that hemmed us in all round, save where the broad estuary with its overhanging woods swept back in a succession of lake-like stretches for miles inland.

I shall never forget that summer holiday, nor how, when the dusk of the evening came on, we used to saunter along the promenade, and watch the sun set far over the Cardigan bay, and Bardsey island showed distinct against the rosy light. One day we had all, with the help of donkeys for the ladies, scrambled to the top of a mountain second only to Cader in height.

It was rather misty immediately below us, especially in one hollow, but to seaward it was beautifully clear, and we could see the white line of surf that marks the dangerous causeway of St. Patrick reaching far out into the bay. Suddenly the mist opened in the hollow where it was deepest, and we saw the gleam of water.

"Hollo! what Llyn is that?" exclaimed Jack.

Seymour pulled out a guide book, and referring to the map—"Why, it must be Llyn Cadws, where that old guide said there were such big pike."

"What do you say to going down to it?" I said, "that is, if the ladies don't mind staying here alone for a time."

"You two fellows go, and I'll stay," said Seymour.

Morton and I soon ran down to it, rousing a heron and a couple of wild ducks as we did so. It was some four or five acres in extent. On one side the cliffs rose perpendicularly from the water in some places, and in others the débris had formed a rugged and picturesque shore. On the other side it was shallow and open, and—a rare thing in mountain lakes—a thick bed of weeds reached some distance out.

Jack, who was prowling along here, stopped, and sinking down on his knees beckoned me to do the like and join him. I did so, to the no small detriment of my cuticle, and saw a sight which aroused all my fish-

ing proclivities in a moment. A large pike was basking over the weeds, eyeing us savagely.

"Twelve pounds, if an ounce," whispered Morton, as the big fish slowly backed out of sight in that mysterious way that fish will disappear if they are looked at but not rudely startled.

A splash, and then another, in the middle, showed us that there were, as indeed the guide-book would have told us, some large trout in the tarn. The presence of pike was a guarantee, too, that there wouldn't be many small ones.

Two or three days afterwards Morton led me down to the Railway Station, and pointed triumphantly to a large hamper. On unfastening the lid, I saw that it was full of "trimmers," which, for the benefit of the uninitiated, I may explain are round pieces of wood with lines fastened to them. These, when baited with small fish, are set to float on a river or lake, and sad havoc they make among the pike. They are not, of course, considered fair contrivances amongst sportsmen, and so I exclaimed, "Why, you poaching sinner, whatever are you going to do with those?"

"Set them in Llyn Cadws."

"But how will you get them there?"

"Donkeys," he answered laconically, as he tied the lid on again.

"And how will you set them, and take them up again without a boat?"

"Sent up to Dolgelly for a coracle: there it is," said he, pointing to one of those desperately unsafe washing-tub-like things, made of laths, and covered with tarred canvas, which the Welsh fishermen use.

"And bait?" I again asked.

A wink was the sole answer.

"I'm game, old fellow, though I'd rather go and fish fair; but it will be a bit of an adventure, and there are two things in regard to which I could never resist temptation, and those are—falling in love and getting into a scrape."

I left the arrangements to Morton, and the next afternoon a couple of donkeys awaited us at the door of the hotel, laden with the coracle, trimmers, provisions, a tarpaulin and some short poles for a tent, and a big bait tin, which, when I took a sly peep at it, I found to be full of samlets and small trout neatly packed in bran. I thought it best not to ask where they came from, especially as a man, who looked like a river-watcher, was dodging about in a suspicious manner, and taking great interest in our proceedings. To these impedimenta I added my pike and fly rods, with the et ceteras.

We intended to set the trimmers that evening, and

stay on the mountain all night. The ladies promised to join us on the morrow, and assist in taking up the trimmers. So, with a boy to drive the donkeys, off we started. It was a hot August day, but Cader Idris wore his cap of cloud, and we knew that rain was not far off. Up we went with frequent pauses, ostensibly to look at the piled-up hills or the majestic curves of the estuary, down which a yacht was dropping with the tide, her sails hanging idle, with not a breath of air to fill them. It was oppressive enough for thunder, and we were still some distance from the Llyn, when our donkey boy called out, "The storm is coming, sir," and, looking in the direction of his uplifted stick, we saw the far-off hills suddenly covered with mist, that tumbled and tossed about and whirled down the glens in a manner suggestive of violent commotion.

"Look out for the squall! down with your topsails!" roared Seymour to the yacht below, forgetful in his excitement of the distance that separated us from her, for she seemed so directly below us, that one would almost fancy we could throw a stone on her deck.

There were sharp eyes on board, however; and, as we crouched under the lee of a rock, we had the satisfaction of seeing her taking in sail, and preparing to

meet the storm. Then the blinding rain hid everything from our sight. It was soon over, and the sun shone with increased brilliancy. The yacht was some two miles further down the estuary, shaking out the reefs in her mainsail. We hurried to reach the tarn, and saw the water literally boiling with trout, while the dashes along the margin told us that the pike were on the run. The coracle was soon launched, the trimmers baited; and while Seymour and Morton proceeded to set them, I took my fly rod and set to work with a will, for the trout in all these Llyns are very capricious, and there was no knowing how soon they might leave off feeding.

The two in the coracle did not begin very auspiciously, for they went on spinning round at a tremendous rate, and made progress in every direction but the one they desired. At last, profiting by my directions, Morton got into the figure-of-eight stroke by which these boats are impelled, and they got along more smoothly. They set the trimmers at regular distances along the edge of the weeds, around the rocks, by stones, and finished with a line straight across the tarn to windward, so that they might drift across. In the mean time I had landed two speckled beauties, one two pounds in weight, and the other one pound and a half; and by the time they had finished their

work the ripples had died away, the trout had gone off the feed, and I laid down my rod and prepared for a bathe. Oh ! the delights of a header off a rock ten feet high, and an unknown depth of clear, cold water below you ! And that tarn *was* cold. We swam across and back again, and then, after dressing, Seymour and the boy started off home, with the intention of bringing the ladies up the next day. Left to ourselves, Morton and I rigged up our tent, lit a fire of dry gorse and fern, broiled one of the trout, and then concocted a glass of grog to accompany our cigars.

Reader, if you are fond of the mysterious, and delight in supernatural stories, spend a night on the mountains. You will soon be in a condition to believe the most marvellous fairy-tales that ever were told by the light of peat fires, in lonely mountain cottages. It was very awful and solemn, that gradual approach of night, amid the stillness of the hills—stillness that was only broken now and then by the cry of the lapwing, a cry that always makes my blood curdle when heard at night, when it comes with startling distinctness upon the ear. We could almost fancy at times that it came from those ghost-like forms of mist, that rose in slender columns from the water, and which needed but little imagination to transfer them into fays and water sprites emerging for their nightly gambols.

Few other sounds reached the ear. Sometimes the splash of some monster in the pool, or the rattle of a stone down the mountain side, broke the quiet. With the natural instincts of men in such a position, we spoke in whispers; and if now and then we made an effort and spoke in our natural voice, it went echoing so loudly from rock to rock, and seemed so out of place, that we gladly lowered our tone, and half expected the spirits of the night to take instant vengeance on the two daring men who had invaded their solitudes. Wrapped in our rugs, on odorous beds of fern, and well protected from the mist by the tarpaulin, we were soon in a sound sleep. When I awoke the dark was just lifting; and arousing Morton, we got up and stretched ourselves, and then climbed to the top of the mountain to watch the sunrise. Below us all was one sheet of mist. To the eastward the mountain tops peeped above it, and were just fringed with the daylight. The first silvery white of the dawn changed into a beautiful green, which rose higher and higher, and diminished in size, until it became a mere streak between the more brilliant colours of red and orange. One by one the rosy rays darted across the mist to our feet, and at last the sun was fairly up. The clouds then began to roll up from the hill sides, and melt away in the blue. The mist shot up in many-

tinted columns, or passed in heavy billows away to seaward; and as it opened out, glens, villages, lakes, and farms showed clearly in the morning air. We sat quietly looking at it all, and listening to the click of the stonechat perched on a boulder near us, and the not unmusical call of the cow-boy far down below. Morton was the first to speak.

"I say, old fellow, I want to speak to you about Winnie. I know you're considerably spooney upon her. Why don't you pluck up courage and speak to her? we shall be away in a week, and you mayn't have another opportunity goodness knows how long. I'd as soon have you for a brother-in-law as any fellow I know."

"Thank you, Jack," I said; "but you see how she avoids me."

"That's because you were too impetuous at first: you frightened her; and besides, somebody's been regaling her with some precious stories about you; and between you and me, Alec, you know you ain't so good as you might be."

"That's just it. I'm not half up to her, and I am afraid it will be labour in vain; but I'll try—to-day, if I can."

"That's right; and now let us have some breakfast."

During breakfast we "spotted" several trimmers with

the red side up—a sign that a fish was on, and one in particular was careering across the pool in famous style. We bathed, of course, and Morton could not resist the temptation of taking a trimmer line in his teeth, and swimming ashore with the fish, an exploit which nearly cost him his life, through the line getting twisted round his legs.

About twelve o'clock we saw four donkeys coming up the hill, three with the girls, and the fourth considerately laden with a large basket of provisions. The girls were delighted with our camp, and Carrie must needs go out by herself in the coracle; and as she, like all tyros, could only spin it around, we had to get her back by tying a stone to my pike line, and, throwing it across her, drag her gently back by its means.

We had grand fun hauling in the pike. True, there were not many—twelve, I think—but then not one was less than four pounds, and one was nearly thirteen. Some of them fought so stoutly that we had to paddle ashore with the line for safety's sake, in which case the lines were given to the girls, and then there was such screaming and laughing, as they pulled the struggling, snapping brutes ashore. Winnie did not seem to enjoy it so much as the others; she was sorry for the poor fish, and I thought looked rather disgusted as I gave them the *quietus* with a big stone.

After all the trimmers had been taken up, and we had lunched in right royal fashion, close by a bubbling spring, Jack proposed a stroll, and offered his arm to his cousin Carrie, to whom he was engaged. Eva with a sly look at me took Seymour's arm, and Winnie placed her delicate little hand within mine. I don't think I have told you what she was like. Well! I am not a good hand at describing female beauty; but if you imagine her to be perfection, you will be of just the same mind as I was, and am too, for the matter of that. I was very much in love with her, and lovers' descriptions of their mistresses are apt to be very tedious, I think. She was *distrait*, and so was I, for I was concocting a neat little speech, which was to begin with a classical quotation meaning "while we catch, we are caught," in allusion to the sport we had lately been engaged in. By the time we had turned I had prepared a most burning and eloquent address, and, watching my opportunity, I detained Winnie with some remarks about the scenery, until the others had rounded a point of rock, and then I commenced "*Dum*"—and then stuck fast—the "*capimus capimur*" refused to come forth, and all the fine things I had intended to say vanished to the winds.

"I beg your pardon?" she said interrogatively, and

then, seeing my embarrassment, she added mischievously, "I hope you are not really *dumb*, though I confess I was afraid that such was the case."

This unkind cut threw me so completely on my beam-ends, that I forgot to remind her that she had been as silent as I; but I felt desperate, and turning round and facing her I said, "Just listen to me, Miss Morton. Winnie—the fact is—that is—I—" but I do not intend to tell you what I did say. I know I came to grief sadly with my grammar, and I was devoutly thankful that my audience could not be a very critical one. I managed, however, to make her understand what I meant, and then when I finished she stood for some minutes looking very seriously at the hole she was absently digging in the turf with the point of her parasol. When she looked up, there was a smile on her face, that told me all was well.

"Will you promise me three things?" she said.

"Anything in the world," I answered.

"You must give up fishing and shooting, because they are such cruel sports."

"I promise," and may I be forgiven if there was a mental reservation.

"You must not flirt."

"My darling, do you think I would?"

"And you must be very, very good."

"I'll do my best."

"Then—" but there was no need for any more words.

When we came to our camp, they were just beginning to pack up.

"All right, Jack," I said.

"We know that," replied he, "and next time you make a proposal on the hills, remember that sound travels a long distance; but we'll charitably suppose that certain noises like that"—clapping one hand on the other—"were multiplied by the echoes to the extent we heard them."

"Pax! Jack, spare us," I exclaimed, and I verily believe I blushed. If I didn't, Winnie did.

When we came back to the hotel, I saw the river watcher who had taken such an interest in our departure, loitering about in company with a policeman, and the latter came up to me and said—

"Beg pardon, sir, are you Mr. Morton?"

"No; that's Mr. Morton," I replied.

"Ah, then, perhaps you are Mr. Hinton?"

"That is my name."

"And that gentleman's name is Seymour, perhaps?"

"It is."

"Then I am very sorry," rapidly giving each of us a blue folded paper, "but when gentlemen like you break the law, what are we to expect from the lower

classes?" and with a pompous "Good evening," our friend in blue marched off with the watcher, leaving us three staring at each other, and the girls half ready to cry.

"Just my luck," thought I, as I found the paper to be a summons for unlawfully taking samlets and aiding and abetting therein.

It took us a long time to persuade the girls and Mrs. Morton that a fine would be the only punishment, and that no particular disgrace was attached to our offence. As for me, I thought a wife was worth winning, even at the enormous expense of two pounds and costs; and she, in return for that assurance and a dozen others, was so kind as to let me off the first of my three promises.

XV.

A MORASS ADVENTURE

In the latter part of last summer I was led in company with some relatives to spend my holidays at a little village on the Welsh coast, out of the ordinary beat of tourists, but otherwise remarkable for nothing but its general air of bleakness and sterility. The place was very quiet, but the lodgings were cheap and tolerably comfortable. These essentials being secured, we had to put up with the scenery, which was not very attractive. A long, low line of beach, surmounted by a high pebble ridge, leading on the one hand to the foot of some bold jutting cliffs, and on the other losing itself in an estuary; behind this, a black and dreary-looking bog, stretching three or four miles inland, and intersected in every direction by wide, artificial ditches, and deep, natural fissures

connecting the inky pools. A small river flowing into the estuary divides the bog, its course being marked by mounds of peat, cut from the firmer ground which forms its banks. Branching out at right angles to the river are other lines of peat-stacks, following the course of the larger drains, which herald the attempt to cultivate the dreary waste.

This was the view I beheld, as, standing one evening on the top of the stony ridge, I faced eastward. The sinking sun threw my shadow far over the bog, distinctly visible as it fell over the gilded rushes and the crimsoning pools. I had been strolling out with my gun, in the hope of adding some specimens to my cabinet, and was thinking of returning homewards, when a long-legged heron slowly sailed high overhead, in the direction of the river. I watched the bird till it alighted near one of the peat-stacks, and carefully noting the spot, I proceeded to a careful stalk, hoping to secure an acquisition. I contrived to get within seventy yards of the heron, and, as there was no cover of any kind nearer, I lay down behind the last mound I had reached, and with finger on the trigger watched patiently, in the hope that my quarry would feed towards me. I was not disappointed; it gradually approached some yards nearer my hiding-place, and either caught sight or scent of me, for it

suddenly rose, but in so doing came within range. Bang! went both barrels. Uttering a hoarse croak, the heron flew heavily away, keeping close to the ground, and evidently hard hit. I sprang up and followed, jumping the ditches, and avoiding the soft ground as best I could. During one particularly long jump, I lost sight of the heron for a moment; I caught sight of it again just in time to see it fall to the earth as softly as a snow-flake, and lie still with wings outspread to their full stretch. Between the bird and me, however, there was a crevasse wider than any I had yet leaped, and a dozen yards on the other side lay the object of my pursuit. The black slimy sides of the ditch overhung the water, which lay deep and still some six or seven feet below, and a few yards to the right connected with a large pool, having equally high and muddy banks. To the left was a labyrinth of similar ditches. Some distance in front, a broader and straighter crack in the flat expanse showed where the river lay. The bank on which I stood was a foot or two higher than the opposite bank. I describe the situation thus minutely in order to make the reader understand what afterwards happened.

Not liking to lose the prize so nearly in my grasp, I resolved to risk the jump. Laying down the gun, and taking off my coat, I made the effort, and cleared

the ditch, only, however, by a few inches. I secured the heron, and smoothing its beautiful plumage, but little injured by the shot, threw it across to the bank from which I had just come. Then, on looking around, I found myself in a sort of *cul-de-sac*. The bit of firm ground on which I stood was an island, and the only way for escape was the one by which I arrived. Having to "take off" from a lower level, it was much harder to get back than it was to come; but, as there was no alternative, it had to be tried. I did not leap quite far enough, and pitched with hands and knees together against the edge. There was no vegetation to catch hold of, and after hanging on the balance for a few moments, vainly clutching at the mud, I fell backwards with a heavy splash into the water.

Fortunately, I am a good swimmer, and at first, while treading water, the ludicrousness of the affair alone struck me; but when I began to see that it might be difficult to get up those slimy, overhanging banks, I must confess I felt rather frightened. It was impossible to get out at the spot where I had fallen in. I swam farther up the ditch, and, trying to bottom it, felt my feet touch the soft, tenacious mud, that gave no support, but was ten times more dangerous than the water. The water became shallower as I struggled on, but the muddy bottom refused to give me a stand-

ing-place, and the muddy sides afforded no hold for my hands. It at last became so shallow, that I had to turn on my back to avoid kicking the mud as I swam; and when in this position I could push my arms into it with almost as much ease as I could push them through the water; but to draw them out again was far from easy. With a horrid fear of being unable to extricate myself from the mud, and of a slow suffocation, I made a sudden dash back into the deeper water, and tried the other ditches, only to be repulsed in the same manner. I swam round and round the pool, seeking for an outlet, and beginning to feel my boots and clothes very heavy. Even now I involuntarily smiled at the comparison which suddenly occurred to me, between myself in this plight and a mouse swimming round a bucket of water; but the thought that I too, like it, might be swimming for my life soon drove all ludicrous thoughts out of my head.

Matters now began to look very serious, when I saw a root or branch of some long-buried tree projecting out of the bank. I caught hold of it; but it was not strong enough to enable me to lift myself by it out of the water. All that I could do was to support myself with my hands just sufficiently to keep my head above the surface. I took this opportunity of kicking off my boots.

Up to this time I could scarcely realize my position; but now the conviction began to dawn upon me that I might never again see the mother and sisters I had left in the cottage a mile and a half away. I looked up at the sky, in which the twilight was fast giving place to the moonlight, and across which the clouds were merrily driving before the evening breeze; and then I looked at the black and slimy walls which hemmed me in, and felt as though I were about to scream with terror. From my childhood I have always had a horror of confinement of any kind. I have felt strangely uncomfortable when I have been persuaded into exploring a cave, or when I have been shown through a prison. This feeling I now felt more strongly than the fear of drowning. To die hemmed in by those gloomy walls would be terrible.

To add to the discomfort, a hollow booming sound, almost amounting to a roar, ran through the quivering bog, intensified to me, no doubt, by my imprisonment in the heart of the morass. This, though I had never heard it before, I knew to be the note of the bittern. During the night it was repeated several times, and anything more dismal it would be hard to imagine.

I had not as yet thought of shouting, but I now did so till I was hoarse. The only answer was the eerie

scream of the curlew. The improbability of any one being near enough to hear me, so late, struck me, and I desisted from the useless labour. The stillness was intense, broken only at rare intervals by the bittern or curlew. How long I clung to the branch I do not know. Fortunately, the water was not cold. The clouds had cleared away, and the moon, near the full, shone brightly. Had it been dark, my courage must have given way, and I should most probably have sunk. As it was, I cannot say that I quite despaired of a rescue in some way or other. If I could only hold out till morning, some one might, I conjectured, come for the purpose of carrying away the turf sods, and might see my coat and gun, which would lead to a search. I had not much hope in the event of any search from the village; I had started in the direction of the cliffs, my favourite evening haunt, and I fancied that would be the direction the searchers would take. As the night wore on, oh! so slowly, with the moon so calmly gliding through the stars above me, I fell into a kind of stupor, and I can distinctly remember repeating scraps of verses totally unconnected with each other. From this state I was aroused by the loud note of some night-bird, probably an owl, and found my arms very stiff from holding on to the root, while my legs felt like weights of lead suspended beneath me. While

trying to change my position, I fancied I heard the gurgling sound of running water, and that not far off. I listened intently, and found it was no fancy. Water was evidently running into the pool, and I saw by the root to which I was clinging that the water had risen some inches.

A cheering hope sprang up within me, as it flashed across my mind that the tide must be rising, and that the pool must have an outlet into the river.

The thought infused new life into me, and I struck out in the direction of the sound. Then, to my intense joy, I saw distinctly, in the clear moonlight, that the water was streaming in fast through several small inlets, and pouring in quietly and steadily through one of the ditches up which I had previously swum. I knew that if the tide rose another foot or eighteen inches I could, by treading water fast, spring up so high as to be able to catch hold of the top of the bank, and so swing myself up. I knew also that the water could not possibly begin to flow into the bog-pools until it was nearly high tide. Returning to my resting-place, I watched anxiously, the prospect of speedy deliverance banishing all weariness. The water continued to pour in steadily and in greater volume. The dawn was now breaking, and I had not much longer to wait. The water had ceased flowing, and the bank in one

place was barely five feet above the water. Taking a long breath, I let myself sink low; and then treading water as strongly and quickly as possible, I threw half my body above the surface of the pool, and caught the top with one hand. Before the soft earth had time to crumble beneath my weight I had obtained a firmer grasp with the other hand, and in another moment stood on the moss—saved, drinking in with eager gasps the fresh air of the morning.

The white haze was rapidly clearing away, and through it I saw five or six men hurrying towards me. I have a confused idea of being helped to my lodgings, and of afterwards telling my adventure to many eager questioners.

The soaking I had had, and the exposure to the unhealthy mists which rise from the morass in the night, caused an illness for a time, but the effects soon wore off.

The heron is stuffed, and adorns my cabinet, unconscious of the revenge which overtook its destroyer.*

* This article, which originally appeared in "Chambers' Journal," must not be taken as describing an adventure of *the author's*.

XVI.

BREYDON JACK

All who are led by business or pleasure to visit the quaint old town of Great Yarmouth must be familiar with Breydon Water. About five miles in length, and of proportionate width, Breydon, when the tide is in, forms a noble lake. At its head the sluggish waters of the Yare are released from their parent marshes, and, uniting with the purer stream of the beautiful Waveney, enter Breydon on their journey seawards. When the tide is out the rivers run through a wide channel, on either side of which stretch miles of glistening mudbanks, the ugly monotony of which is unrelieved by anything but stranded wreckage or flocks of wild-fowl. One's first thought is—how easily might all this expanse of mud be reclaimed and rendered good pasture by merely banking the river in; but upon con-

sideration it is easy to see that Breydon is a safety-valve for the tide, which would, if it had not room to expand after the narrow entrance at Southtown, "back up" the river water, and flood the inland marshes.

The river-channel is marked by a double row of massive square posts, one row being painted red and the other black, to enable the crews of vessels driven against them in the night to ascertain, by the simple process of striking a light, on which side of the channel they are.

"Breydon Jack" was one of a species of men peculiar to waterside places. He was the proprietor of an old and "creechy" boat; and when not in bed, Jack (whose real name was much more aristocratic, although he was never known by any other than his soubriquet) was in his boat on Breydon, or up the river seeking a living in all kinds of ways. In the warm summer weather he might be seen "picking" for eels between Reedham and Cantley. Standing up in the bows of his skiff, he would drive his "pick," or spear, deep into the mud, and in the act of drawing it out impel his boat a yard or two forward, ready for another stroke, shaking off such eels as were impaled by the spear into the boat. When tired of picking he would make his boat fast, stem and stern, and bob for eels with a bunch of worms strung on worstead. Or perhaps you would

find him on Surlingham Broad, or in some reed-bed on the banks of the Waveney, armed with his gun—like himself, a curiosity—shooting the pretty and rare bearded tit for sale, or shooting anything else that was marketable, and in the spring collecting birds' eggs for the naturalists. Jack, too, kept a sharp look-out for flotsam and jetsam—old rope, wood, iron; all was fish that came to his net.

He had a room in a cottage near where the Bure debouches into Breydon. He was a widower, and with him lived his son and daughter. The son had work in the town, and Alice, who was about eighteen, did odd jobs for the neighbours when her household duties were over. She was a comely, honest girl, and a great favourite with her father, who was himself a decent sort of fellow.

One of Jack's occupations in the winter months was shooting wildfowl on Breydon muds, where they were sometimes very numerous. This resource had of late years been of little value to him, the increase in the number of sportsmen being so great, and the pursuit after the birds so keen, that they were much more difficult of access than they formerly were.

It was a blustering Saturday afternoon in December The west wind came sweeping down Breydon with increasing force. The wherries, the crews of which were

anxious to reach Yarmouth before nightfall, were running before the wind with their large single sails close reefed and the peaks lowered half-way down the masts. The white surf which broke over their bows and seethed along the decks told of the force with which they were impelled through the water. When the sails gybed one could hear the deep, thunderlike flaps of the brown canvas at a great distance. Inky banks of clouds rose in the western horizon, and broke up into detached masses, which coursed each other rapidly across the pale, stormy blue of the heavens, the white wings of the sea-birds gleaming against them. Alice sat at the window watching the railway passengers come over the bridge, and now and then looking over the waste of waters. Her father had a job at Southtown, and she did not expect him home until dark, which would not be for another hour. The fire was banked up in the grate, ready to be stirred into a blaze when her father came home; and the kettle was simmering on the hob. She had thrown a shawl over her, to keep herself warm, and a thumb-worn copy of Watts' Hymns lay on her lap. She was neatly though poorly dressed, and she had a patient, hopeful expression in her face that one could not help but like. The extreme cleanliness of everything in the room showed her housewifely care.

A heavy step on the stair startled her from a reverie, and she was surprised to see her father—for it was he—return so early.

"What's the matter, father?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing, Liss; let's have some tea, there's a good girl."

Alice, or "Liss," knew her father disliked being questioned, so she set about giving him his tea as nimbly as possible, a "dab" (a kind of flat fish) which he had brought home with him giving a relish to the humble meal. Tea over, her father took down his gun and proceeded to clean it, rinsing it out with hot water, and afterwards inserting the breech end of the barrel between the bars of the grate, a proceeding which apparently did no harm to the old shooting-iron, and speedily dried it. After well oiling it, the barrel was replaced in the stock, and the gun was ready.

"You are not going out shooting to-night, father?" said Liss.

"Ay, my wench, I am—after good game, too. I seed five wild swans make for Breydon this afternoon, and they'll be on the muds to-night," answered he, as he drew on his long woollen stockings over his trousers, and then a pair of well-greased thigh boots.

"But the water is so rough, father dear," urged Liss, as she handed him his oilskin jacket and sou'wester.

"Never fear. I'll row up with the tide and sail back. Maybe I'll not be gone more'n an hour or two."

"Do be careful, father; I'll sit up until you come back. I wish you weren't going."

"Tut, tut, child; give me a kiss, and come and see me off, for luck."

He had a tough pull to get out of the in-coming tide of the Bure; but once clear of its current he rapidly made headway against the wind, and Alice lost sight of him in the swift coming darkness. Then she returned, and, after washing the teacups and putting them away, she sat over the dying fire—coals were too dear to allow her to replenish it, as there was only herself to warm—alone with her thoughts. Her father had been out on nights quite as bad as the present, but she had never before felt the strange yet vague fear that now beset her. She would have sought her brother's company, but he had gone in the country for his Sunday outing, sweethearting.

Meanwhile Breydon Jack pulled his skiff along the edge of the channel, where the wash caused by the opposing currents of wind and tide was less. Before the daylight quite faded away, and the boundary of marsh and waving reeds was lost in the mist which arose even on that cold wintry night, he had marked

the swans down on a mudbank on the south side of the channel and noted with satisfaction that he was the only gunner in pursuit. Indeed, he was the only human being afloat on Breydon. His design was to cross the channel when the tide had slackened sufficiently to enable him to do it with safety, and to paddle up to leeward of the swans under cover of the darkness. By that time they would be gathered close together on the last few yards of bank which would remain uncovered by the tide. This, when the time came, he succeeded in doing, and in getting within a hundred yards of the swans, whose white bodies were just discernible ahead. A few more strokes of the sculls, then drawing them quietly in, he seized his gun, while the current bore him closer to his quarry. He was just within shot when his boat slewed round broadside to the waves, which were dancing about in a nasty manner over the mud. There was no time to get an oar out to right her, as the swans had taken the alarm, and one of them had arisen. Standing up, the better to cover them, Jack shouted, and as the others lifted their wings he fired. One lay struggling on the sloppy mud; the others rose heavily, but flew away unhurt, with the exception of one, which shaped its course away from its companions and rose high in the air or "towered," bearing away towards Yarmouth, and most

probably fatally wounded. Jack, however, could not reap the reward of his successful shot, for the recoil of his gun, which he had loaded too heavily, acting upon his insecure footing, had thrown him backwards, and in an instant the skiff capsized, and he was struggling in the water, unable from his burdensome clothing to swim, and with not a soul near to help. He was borne past the mud, but he made no effort to reach it, for he well knew that its treacherous surface would afford no support to him, and also that the tide would soon cover it deeply. His only hope lay in clinging to his boat; but that had floated beyond his reach and out of his sight. Thousands of distracting thoughts coursed through his brain, the chief of which were for his daughter Alice. The cold water was numbing his limbs, and his sodden clothes were dragging him down. He tried to pray, and resigned himself to his fate, while a pair of laughing gulls were screaming above him ; and the moon shooting with startling suddenness over the jagged edge of a cloud shed a fitful light over the angry waters, and, by showing him how distant was all hope of succour, augmented his misery.

Liss still sat alone in her room. The fire had gone out, and she had rearranged the wood and coal so that a cheerful blaze might easily be procured when her

father came home. After a while, feeling restless, she went out, and, wrapped up tightly in her shawl, walked along the Acle Road, and thence across the railway to the embankment which fringes Breydon. Hearing a rustling overhead, she looked up and saw a large white mass hurtling through the air towards her. It fell on the marsh a score or two of yards away. Going up to it, she found it to be a dead swan. Guessing that it was one which had been wounded by her father, she took it up, and not liking to carry it into Yarmouth herself, she hid it under a stack of the coarse marsh hay. She felt that she might now expect her father's immediate return. The tide was hurrying seawards like a mill-race, and he would not be more than half an hour reaching home. She went in and lit the fire, and then went down to the wharf to meet him. As the moonlight shone through frequently recurring rifts in the clouds, she tried to make out his boat on the gleaming surface of Breydon. But in vain. An hour passed away, and she went to the quay to see if by any chance he had landed there. But no; and Alice felt seriously alarmed. She was a brave girl, and, with a consciousness that there was nothing to be gained by sitting down and crying, she paced up and down the deserted wharves, trying to hit upon some plan of action. It was now late. The church clock had struck the

hour of eleven. Her father should have been back two hours ago. She wondered if she could get a boat and go in search of her father; but she knew no one to ask. A voice startled her.

"Hallo, young lady, not meditating suicide, I hope?" exclaimed one of two young men who were strolling along arm in arm, staggering either from the effects of wine or the strong wind. She drew back into the shadow, fearful of insult, to which, poor girl! she was not a stranger. These two, however, passed on and jumped on board a small yacht lying moored just outside a wherry. Then lights appeared in the cabin; and out of a desire for some sort of company in her loneliness she drew near, and stepping on board the wherry, she sat down on the hatches and watched the yacht.

"Look here, old man," she heard one of the gentlemen say to the other, "you had better finish that cigar of yours on deck. This pigeon-hole of a place is as full of smoke as it can be already."

"All right; to oblige your delicate constitution, I will; but there's time for you to go and sleep on shore now if you like," and the speaker emerged from the cabin, catching sight of Alice as he did so.

"By Jove! here's the suicidally-minded young lady again. What's the matter, my dear?"

Alice had made up her mind to seek assistance from the yachtsmen, and she spoke—

"Oh, sir, may I speak to you for a minute?"

"Certainly," and fishing up a lanthorn, he turned the light on her face. Seeing that she was not what he had taken her to be, he asked her to step into the cabin, if she had anything particular to say. She went and told her story, beseeching his help. Her misery touched his heart, and her youth and comeliness aroused his gallantry.

"I don't see that we can do much for you, Miss," he said. "If, which I trust is not the case, he has been capsized, there is little chance of his being alive now, unless he clings to his boat, and the tide would have carried him out to the sea by this time. But don't be afraid. I will do what I can for you," he added, seeing her imploring look.

"Huke! Huke!" and presently Huke, a long-legged young sailor, stumbled aft, half dressed and half asleep. Now, Huke had seen Alice many times before, although she did not know him, and he was a deep admirer of hers, so that when he understood the position of matters, his alacrity in setting the canvas and getting ready for a start rather astonished his master.

"Why, Harrison, you are not going to take the yacht out?" said Brown, his friend.

"Yes, old chap; why not? the jolly boat wouldn't live. You needn't come unless you like."

"You wooden-headed charger of windmills, do you think I wouldn't stand by you in your maddest of tricks, if only to see that you didn't hurt yourself? Besides, you will want me to-night. The young woman had better keep below, out of the way. Very likely we shall find her father safe at the Berney Arms" (a public-house at the top of Breydon).

All the reefs of the mainsail were taken in, and the yacht's head was canted for a tack across the river. She shot across, gunwale under, and came back on the opposite tack, to find that she had not gained a yard, the ebb tide was so strong. This performance was twice repeated, and then Brown and Huke got out with a rope and worked the boat up along the line of wherries moored to the wharves, until they got around into the mouth of the Bure, and some little way up it. Casting off, they were carried by its cross current well out into the open, where they caught the wind more aslant. Slowly, very slowly, they beat their way up the channel in silence. Huke stood on the counter with the mainsail sheet in his hand. Harrison stood at the helm, and Brown took charge of the foresail sheet. The wind roared, the water hissed under the bows, and foamed in a white wave

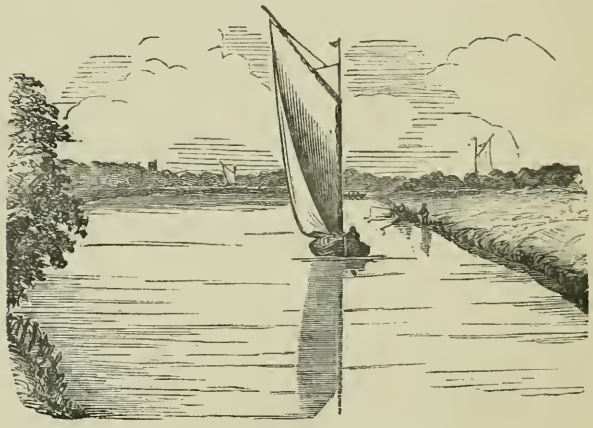
astern; the lee rail was continually under water, and the chafing of the sheets, the rattling of the blocks, and the whistling of the gale in the shrouds, made conversation an impossibility. Alice left the cabin and curled herself up at the heel of the bowsprit, heedless of the spray which stung the face like hail as it was driven against it, and straining her eyes to catch sight of any object which might resemble her father's boat.

"A wild goose chase, this," muttered Harrison to himself, as the yacht neared one of the boundary posts, and he was in the act of putting the helm over for another tack. A piercing shriek came from the bows, and he saw Alice standing up and pointing to the posts. Sure enough he saw some dark mass attached to it. Hesitating a little in his management of the helm, the yacht missed stays, and drifting back, two more tacks had to be made before they reached the post again. Brown, pushing frenzied Alice back, grappled it with the irons. There was poor Jack lashed to a mooring staple in the post with his neck-cloth and braces and the shoulder strap of his shot pouch. It appeared that he had drifted against the post when just on the point of sinking, and he had sufficient strength left to lash himself securely to it. He was cold and apparently lifeless. While Alice and Brown, who was fortunately a doctor, did what they

could to revive him in the cabin, Harrison and Huke worked the yacht up to the Berney Arms. Here they stopped and made the yacht fast. After a great deal of knocking and shouting, they succeeded in getting the people up, and a fire lit in one of the rooms. Poor Jack was taken in there, and then began the slow and doubtful process of arousing life in the cold and inanimate body. After a long time—and a time of agony to Alice—Jack began to breathe and give signs of returning consciousness. During this anxious time Huke won favour in the eyes of the maiden by his ready and efficient assistance.

By means of unremitting care and attention for many hours, Breydon Jack recovered. His naturally strong constitution, rendered hardy by his mode of life, pulled him through, but he was never afterwards the same man as he had been previously. Rheumatism seized him in its clutches, and left him powerless to resume his old occupations. He was made comfortable for the rest of his life by his son and his son-in-law,—for the upshot of it was that Alice married Huke. Jack died the other day, and I learned the story from Harrison on board the same yacht, and on Breydon Water, but under far different circumstances. The wind was abaft; the sun was shining brightly, and the wavelets danced merrily in its beams. The topsail and balloon

jib were set, for we had come in, the winners of a race, and were sailing home to the westward under racing canvas. The waterman who steered the yacht in the match was sailing her then, and we were in the cabin discussing some lunch when the story was told. Harrison says, that exciting as the race was, it was not half so exciting as the slow and dangerous beat up Breydon the night he rescued "Breydon Jack."



WHERRIES ON THE YARE.

WINTER-TIME ON THE MERES.

XVII.

WINTER-TIME ON THE MERES

The Meres of Salop, so pleasant to the eye in the bright summer, are even more attractive, to my thinking, in the depth of winter. Black water beneath, grey sky above, bare trees, gaunt and grim, with equally grim shadows on the water; dull green of sodden grass, with brown stains of decayed vegetable matter soiling it here and there; over all a chill wind sweeping—such are the meres at a first glance in the winter.

Not by any means an attractive picture, one would think; but a little careful use of the eyes will make it most interesting. At such times the book of nature is freely opened to the observer. No longer hidden by the summer foliage, bird life especially is more distinctly revealed to us. Pushing along in a punt by the wooded margin, many a discovery of some rare bird is made; many an action of dumb life, that leaves

us in some doubt as to whether instinct has not a wider meaning than we are generally disposed to give it, is observed; and many a lesson to oneself is learnt in a few short hours.

Still more beautiful are the meres when a keen, hard frost has been for days binding the land in its iron chains; when the upland and plain are hidden in a soft white carpet of snow; when the wildfowl nestle among the rotten reeds and long dead herbage by the side of the mere, and send forth their strange cries to the wondering air. Then numerous tracks in the snow tell of the passage of animals and birds, whose existence one scarce suspects in the summer. The holly bushes near the houses are crowded with blackbirds and thrushes, eager for the crimson berries. If the trees are leafless, yet they are not bare, for the snow hangs in fantastic shapes from every branch and twig, all its feathery crystals glittering in the sunlight. By the shallow and undisturbed part of the mere you can hear in the night the ice crystals tinkling like fairy bells in the starlight, as they shoot across and across, to and fro, in strange intermixture, along the surface of the water that by the morning will be black and hard. Hark!

"Then arose a joyous clamour from the wildfowl on the mere,
Beneath the stars, across the snow, like clear bells ringing."

There is a beauty in the dead of the winter that is unlike everything else. Mornings dawn in a rose-red flush, with interspaces of pearly green, and myriads of gemlike sparkles flashing from the snowy waste between you and the east; long purple and violet shadows of delicate purity lie along and beautify the bright white snow between you and the west; on the moors the distant hills stand out strangely clear in the weather gleam, when from the brow of the upland you can see up glen after glen far away into the heart of the hills, between the marble peaks with tinted outline that shoot up so silently into the pale cold blue; and silence is over all. The evenings shine with an amber radiance; moonlit nights are wonderfully bright; on starlit nights, far overhead, you hear a clanging and calling of passing wildfowl, and see a star momentarily blotted out by the intervention of a dark body—wild geese, for a certainty. Verily there is beauty in the winter, and he who can enjoy it most is he who has an object in view which leads him with a purpose into the country. Be it fishing or shooting, some active pursuit is necessary to the perfect enjoyment of a winter scene.

When the frost has cut down the weeds, and the cold north-easter "hungers into madness every plunging pike," make your way to the water's side ready for the fray; for I can promise sport to any one who can

stand the inclement weather. That pest of the meres, the "breaking of the water," has passed off, and the water is clear and fresh. If there is any sort of a breeze, a spoon is as killing as anything on these meres, and you escape the nuisance of baiting with fingers benumbed with cold.

Some years ago I had capital sport on Ellesmere, the day before Christmas day. It was bitterly cold, and the snow lay deep on the ground. It was in my early days, and an additional charm was lent to the adventure by the fact that I was playing truant. There was, as it happened, a wedding from the house; and, as I have a mortal hatred to any sort of fuss, I had arranged with a friend to drive to Ellesmere and escape it all. The dog-cart was ready waiting in a by-way, with our rods deposited in it. As soon as the ceremony had been performed (and it was early) I made my escape, and off we drove exulting. We managed to secure some small roach for bait, and were soon at work. The rods were stuck out from either side of the stern, and one of us took charge of them while the other rowed. Of course little skill was required, but simply a knowledge of the localities, and some little care in shortening lines when the water shallowed. At the end nearest the workhouse we caught several magnificent perch, and when the shoal

ceased biting we rowed up and down by the boat-houses, where we succeeded in taking several small jack. When a sudden tug at the rod told of a run, its owner seized it, while his companion laid hold of the sculls and backed water. With clear water and no favour, it may be supposed that very few fish were lost.

That day we caught a "whopper." On the Otely side of the mere my rod gave a heavy lunge that told of a big fish; and after a severe contest, during which it was a wonder the crazy old boat was not upset, we got him close alongside, and a frantic and lucky dig with the gaff secured him. I forget the exact weight of the fish, but it was so large that we could not get it into either of our creels, and we hit upon the happy expedient of cutting it in half with our pocket knives, using the seat of the boat as our operating table. We cast lots for the portions, and the head and shoulders fell to my share.

Lately, on Whitemere, two of us made a large bag on just such another winter's day, but by far the greater number were caught by my companion. The first run was at my rod; and, after I had played a large fish until it was close to the boat, my friend made an excited lunge at it with the landing net. The flight of hooks caught in the meshes, a savage shake of the

pike's head followed, and I lost my first fish—always an unlucky omen, and peculiarly so in this instance. My companion had nearly all the runs afterwards. Although we changed rods and places, and fished in exactly the same manner, and I was a constant fisherman while he was only an "outsider," he had all the luck, and nearly all the fish.

I remember we had the best sport on the leeward side of the mere, where the waves were such as to toss our punt about in quite a lively manner, and make it difficult work to row. The fish would touch nothing but a large spoon, and they rushed at it frantically.

Large flocks of coots, and numbers of teal and widgeon, swam cautiously in the centre of the mere, at a very safe distance from the boat. A great crested grebe kept popping up in all sorts of unexpected places, and diving again immediately; vasts clouds of starlings wheeled and manœuvred in the air; and a heron or couple of wild ducks would rise from the sedges as we approached. I confess I allowed my attention to be distracted by these and kindred sights, for I am not unselfish enough to take a keen interest in a companion's sport if I have none myself.

The meres in the winter are full of interest to the naturalist as well as to the sportsman: a better hunting ground for specimens of all kinds could not be

desired. I write from Norfolk, and it will be a long time before I again wet a line in sight of the Wrekin; but of all the places I have seen for pleasant memories and never-failing gladness, give me, in summer or winter, the seven meres of Salop.

XVIII.

AT "THE ANGLER'S REST"

THE quaint, quiet old hostelries of Izaak Walton's time are very few and far between nowadays. I know but one which would have delighted the Father of Anglers. It stands on the margin of one of England's chiefest rivers. Down the eastern bank of the river for a couple of miles are cliffs of red sandstone rising abruptly from the water, and trailed and trellised all over with vegetation—creepers and ferns, whose bright green shines in delicious contrast to the warm hue of the rock. At regular intervals the cliffs descend, and a charming well-wooded valley is disclosed to the view of him who journeys by the river. In one of these valleys, within twenty yards of the river bank, stands a large old-fashioned inn. It is low—only two stories in height—and the roof is thatched with straw, on

which the moss grows, and clusters of houseleek, the juice of which is so good for warts. The bay windows are made of the very smallest diamond panes, and the window-seat inside is large enough for a bed to be made upon it if need be. The bedroom windows have a little roof of their own projecting from the main roof. The chimneys are in all sorts of picturesque and irregular clusters. On one side of the porch a rose bush is trained up to the eaves, and on the other side a clematis bush grows luxuriantly. The porch and door pillars are clothed with honeysuckle, on which the bees gather in too great numbers for timid people to sit comfortably on the bench outside. On a bracket overhead swings the sign, on which is written "The Angler's Rest." There is no garden in front of the house, but, except a narrow pathway to and around the house, the green turf bank slopes away to the water, where there is a sort of staithe at which boats can be moored.

The river is wide here, but is beautifully clear, and runs by over its pebbly bed with a swift current. You would have to go down it a score of miles ere you found it fouled by passing through a town. The pretty little villages it so far passes by leave it unsullied.

Inside the house is as charming as the outside. Everything is spotlessly clean. The bedrooms have

an indescribably fresh and snug look about them. Although the chief articles of food are eggs and bacon, yet the eggs are new-laid, and the bacon is home-fed and home-cured.

"The Angler's Rest" has only lost one charm of late years. Formerly the landlord used to brew his own ale, and grand old ale it was—brewed in October and not allowed to be drunk for at least six months. Now the former owner has sold the "Rest" to a brewer, and honest old Parker has to buy all his ale and liquors of his new landlord. The consequence is, you do not get anything fit to drink in the house. Brewers nowadays brew good ale enough for those who can pay for it, but the country "publics" are supplied with the greatest and most undrinkable rubbish out. I have invariably found this to be the case in all parts of the country. Pure ale you cannot get out of the towns. Whether the fault lies with the brewers in general or with the publicans I am unable to say. Parker would not adulterate his beer, so in his case the fault lay with the brewer. I should like to see a law passed prohibiting a brewer to be the owner of a public-house, or at least to prevent the introduction into the tenants' leases of a clause compelling them to buy their liquors of the landlords. This may be thought a digression; but I have so often had my meals in the country

spoiled by the filthy stuffs I have been obliged to drink, that I must ventilate my grievance.

The "Rest" is two miles away from any village proper, and it is a matter of wonder how any one came to think of establishing an inn there, or how, being established, it supported itself until it became known. Now, however, anglers from all parts of the kingdom come and stay there for days at a time. Artists come to paint and sketch, and literary men sometimes, to write. Very occasionally young men go there to read, which they do furiously for two or three days, then less and less attentively, until all pretence of studying is cast aside, and they very sensibly take to enjoying themselves while they may. In the summer panting canoeists stop for a refresher, and ask how far it is on to the next stage, receiving the answer as a rule with little pleasure, for it is wonderful how distance seems to multiply itself on the water. You are told a place is ten miles off. After paddling or rowing what you imagine to be about six miles, you inquire again, and are told your destination is about seven miles still. Sometimes, too, an eight-oar or a four-oar comes up the stream with long mechanical strokes of the oars, and after its crew have consumed a large quantity of beer and tobacco, starts off again. The only other visitors are the bargees, who navigate barges laden

with fragrant hay or corn up the stream and return with ore from the iron country.

In the winter "The Angler's Rest" is of course very quiet and dull. They have no one there then but the bargees, who are not the best company in the world; though, rough as these fellows are, if you don't meddle with them, they won't meddle with you. I have boated a great many miles over different rivers and canals of England, and I have never met with any discourtesy.

Considering that the river is not preserved, there is fine sport to be had here. In every bend of the stream there is a fine chub hole. In the still deep below the house there is many a fine pike. On the fords trout (and large ones), grayling, dace, roach, gudgeon, and bleak are in plenty. Here and there perch are numerous. But my favourite spot was a tributary of the river, which ran into it about half a mile above the house. It was not large, but the very beau-ideal of a trout stream. It ran down a narrow valley where the oak woods grew thickly. It danced and bubbled over slabs of grey and brown rocks, it splashed and eddied around the roots of giant trees, it laved clusters of fern and mossy ledges; it flowed quietly through shady glades where the grass was long and soft and green, and it spread out into clear and open pools, which

reflected the beauty around. From visiting it often I had got to know every nook and cranny of it. There was the big stone behind which there was always a trout; there was the soft earthy bank where the sand-martins burrowed, and flew in and out, in close proximity to your head as you waded up the stream. There was the unsavoury smelling hole—probably an old sand-martin's hole made larger—where the same pair of kingfishers nested year after year. Have you ever seen their eggs? They are so round and smooth and white, and the shells are so thin, that the yolk imparts to them a delicate pink while they are fresh laid. There too is the old grey bridge, in a crevice under which a pair of dippers nestle year after year, and where one or two broods of water wagtails are hatched. If you were to look very closely you might also find the abode of that beautiful bird, the redstart, or "fire-brand tail," as the country boys call him, from his red tail. Many are the creelfuls of trout I have caught in that stream, and many the pleasant days I have passed by its banks. If the trout were not on the feed, why, one could be happy enough wandering aimlessly up and down, noting this bird or that flower, laying up a store of innocent knowledge, casting off insensibly one's weight of care, and asking for nothing more full of content than the present hour.

Then how pleasant to come back to "The Angler's Rest," and lounge the time away until bedtime in utter idleness.

Old Parker, the landlord, merits a few words. It is unnecessary to say he was an angler. He was one, however, of the old-fashioned school. He believed in oils and unguents wherewith to anoint the bait or the hook. The oil from a heron's legs was, he had heard and believed, an irresistible attraction to the finny tribe. If he could have procured it, he would have been happy; but he never could. Gum ivy he had plenty of, and he was wont to attribute the success—which was in reality owing to his patience and knowledge of where the fish lay—to his use of the gum to flavour his bait. If he used worms, they had been scoured in moss with a piece of gum ivy in. If paste, it was made with a little boiling water just poured over the gum. Artificial flies he never used, but gum ivy was kept with all his lines and hooks. It was a wonder where he procured it all from. Wherever there was any ivy plant of tolerable thickness, you might find an incision cut by him for the gum to accumulate. It was useless to attempt to convince him of the absurdity of his faith in such things. Indeed, it was the way to quarrel with him, if you wished. He was great as a chub fisher, and many a day would he pass seated

under the shade of the willows which overhung some deep, quiet hole, where the big chub lay. "Once a chub hole, always a chub hole," was his saying, and he stuck persistently to one or two favourite places. In dress he was the exact model of those cheap illustrations one sees of old Izaak. A long snuff-coloured coat with huge lappets and pockets, a low, coloured waistcoat and nondescript sort of trousers, a pair of spectacles, and a large brimmed hat, formed his costume. He was a good-natured old fellow, always ready to spin you a yarn about enormous pike or chub, and adventures piscatory or otherwise. His wife was a nice motherly sort of body, and they had their granddaughter living with them, a bright-faced, cheerful lassie of eighteen, who waited on the parlour people.

One hot August day a four-oared boat might have been seen coming up the river at a leisurely pace, until within sight of the "Rest," when the coxswain cried, "Now, put it on for a finish. Pick it up the bow side. Time, Two. You're in too soon. One more, and another, and another, now another. A good one for the last. Easy, all. Take care of your oars, stroke side. Hallo, Parker!" and Parker came down to help out the oarsmen. Bow stepped out first, a light slim-built fellow, just suited for the bow of a racing boat. No. 2 followed. He was like all other young men, and calls

for no particular remark. No. 3 came next, a heavy, lumbering fellow, but who always managed to pull his weight. Stroke *unfolded* himself rather than rose. He was such a length—six feet two in his shoes—and capable of setting a terrible stroke in a race. The coxswain, as in duty bound, stepped out last. He was a dapper little fellow, all laughter and good humour, and, if anything, rather too fond of a practical joke. He had brought his pencils with him, and meant to spend a few days in sketching. The others had brought their fishing-rods, and intended to go in heavily for the slaughter of the finny tribe.

"You won't touch a fin, gentlemen," said Parker, "while this broiling weather lasts."

They did get a little sport, however, in spite of the unfavourable state of the weather and the water, which latter was as clear as glass. Every pebble at the bottom was distinctly visible, and it was impossible to get within yards of the river's side without the fish catching sight of you, and darting away. Still, by fishing early and late, the crew managed to pick up a few fish here and there, for they were by no means deficient in angling skill.

One afternoon they were sitting under the trees in the orchard, chatting and smoking—that is, all except No. 2, who was in love, and therefore spent all his

spare time either in writing letters to his beloved or in composing poetry in her praise. Just then he was sitting a little apart from the others, with his writing-case on his knees, apparently deep in the agonies of composition. The others lay in various attitudes—more easy than elegant—on the grass, lazily interchanging sentences now and then, but paying more attention to colouring meerschaums than anything else.

Suddenly up jumped No. 2 with a yell of astonishing power, upsetting his writing-case, and scattering its contents about in lamentable confusion.

"What the deuce is the row?" said Three, as Two started off for the house at a very quick trot.

"He has been sitting on an ants' nest," shouted Coxswain; "look at the little beggars crawling about. I would sooner sit on a beehive than on an ants' nest. They bite most awfully. I shall go in and help him to get rid of the little pests."

Presently he returned with the information that Two had been bitten in three or four places, and was engaged in rubbing them as well as he could with oil.

Coxswain, ever in mischief, began poking about among the papers Two had left behind him.

"Hooray! he was writing some poetry. Just listen, boys," and he read out with great gusto—

"*To* ————

"Glorious eyes that, flashing love, are on me softly beaming;
Mine seek hers with ardent gaze, and see the lovely gleaming.
Witching time, when hand meets hand——"

Stroke, too lazy to get up, had been rolling himself along the grass towards the coxswain. When he got within reach, his long arm descended upon him, and rescuing the paper, he said, "Coxswain, you've no business with another fellow's private papers. Remember, you are not a woman, and therefore should not have a woman's curiosity. As captain of the boat, I shall fine you half-a-crown if you don't shut up."

"All right, old man; but it's so awfully dull here. We want some amusement. Here comes the Laureate, with a slower step than when he left us."

"I say," called out No. 3, "I have got an idea."

"No?"

"You don't say so?"

"Does it hurt?"

"Where's my note-book?"

"And it's not a bad one," continued Three, unruffled by their chaff.

"It ought not to be, for it's the first you've had since we came here. What is it?"

"Why, I propose that to-morrow, being our last day here, we have an angling match, the winner to have his bill paid for him by the others."

"Hear! hear!"

After some little discussion, the resolution was put to the meeting and was carried. It was arranged that they were all to start off in the morning and go where they liked. They were to return by five, and the one who had the greatest weight of fish was to be adjudged the winner. Nothing but fair angling was to be allowed, and any one using unfair means to fill his basket was to lose his chance. Coxswain kept out of the match, as he was a non-fishing man, and he and Parker were to be the judges.

The next day was, if possible, hotter than ever, and it seemed almost impossible to catch any fish at all. The betting was two to one on Three, as he was considered the most patient, and they had an idea that he, being the first to propose the match, had a plan whereby he hoped to come in the winner. The sequel will show that he had.

We will follow Bow first. He was a trout fisher and nothing else, so he naturally made for the tributary stream I before mentioned, and set to work to fish it carefully from its confluence with the larger river upwards. He tried flies, minnows, and worms. He fished as carefully and skilfully as he could, but not a fin could he touch. The morning had gone by, and his basket was still as empty as when he began;

indeed, more empty, for he had disposed of his lunch. As he ascended the stream, the quantity of water became less and the pools shallower. He saw three or four trout dart away and hide under a large flat stone, the top of which was above the water. Immediately an idea occurred to him. He strove in vain to banish it. He saw how he could fill his basket with trout, and in all probability win the prize. But was it fair? Ought he as a sportsman to do such a thing? Suppose the other fellows found it out. Pooh! it was only a lark, and it was quite fair to try and overreach them a little. If they asked him *how* he had caught his fish, why, he would tell them. If they didn't, all the better for him. One shoe was pulled off—then he hesitated. The other came off. Should he or should he not? Off came his stockings, and tucking up his trousers above his knees, he entered the water. The temptation had been too much for him. Kneeling on the stone, with his arms bare to the shoulders, he felt under it and commenced the process of "*tickling*" the trout. When he felt the tail of a fish he lightly ran his fingers up to its gills, where he "grabbed" it hard and fast, and drew it out. The lowness of the water was in his favour; and, trying all the best holes up the stream, he had in a couple of hours secured fifteen fine trout. Then a feeling of compunction seized him, and he

stayed his hand, feeling pretty secure of being the winner of the match.

He retraced his steps to where he had left his rod. What was his consternation to find it gone! He searched up and down and on all sides, but he could not see any trace of it. Beyond a doubt some one had stolen it—his new fly rod. Heartily vexed at the occurrence, he made his way to the inn, and, after changing his clothes, took up a paper, and lit his pipe, to while away the time until the others came home.

Two, after mature consideration and a consultation with Parker, resolved on "dibbing" for chub as the most likely way of filling his basket. Chub, be it known to the uninitiated, are fond, on hot days, of basking on the top of the water under the shade of the willows or other trees. At such times they may be caught by presenting a natural insect, a beetle, cockchafer, bee, or large fly, to their notice. The hook is run through the back of the insect, and the latter is "dibbed" or dabbled on the top of the water just before their noses, the operator taking care to keep well out of sight. Often a great number may be taken in this manner. Two, however, only succeeded in landing five, all of them good sized ones, though, and he felt pretty sure of winning, until he saw, at the end of a long reach

of still, deep water below him, the stalwart figure of Three engaged in a lengthy contest with some large fish, presumably a pike, which he at last succeeded in landing. "Confound him!" said Two to himself; "who would have thought pike would take a bait this weather?" That one fish would outweigh all mine. By the way, nothing was said about not adding to the *weight* of one's fish. Mine were *caught* fair. Why shouldn't I make them weigh a little more? Here goes."

He collected a quantity of small stones and gravel, and with the aid of a small stick he crammed the stomachs of the defunct chub with them as full as he dared.

"There, that will add materially to their weight. It's time to be going now. What a lovely day it is, and how blue both sky and water are! Ah! Arabella, how I wish you were here with me to enjoy this beautiful scene. I wonder if you are thinking of me—*sweetest*, DEAREST, BEST!"

And with an approving conscience Two marched along.

Three knew where a big pike lay. He judged its weight to be about twelve pounds. It had run at his bait several times, but he had not succeeded in landing it. This day, however, he was determined upon

securing it, by fair means if possible, by foul means if fair were not sufficient. He spun the reach where the pike lay. He gave it a rest, and trolled up and down. He caught a gudgeon and tried live-baiting. Then he tried spoon bait; but all was of no use. Then he gave himself a rest for an hour, and afterwards walked quietly up one bank, waded across at a ford, and walked down the other bank of the river. There the pike was, in his old haunt, and over which Three had cast his bait several times that day. The fish lay suspended midway in the water, and apparently asleep. Three drew from his pocket a piece of long, thin, pliable wire, with a noose already made at the end of it, and artistically blackened in the fire to make it less visible. This he attached to the end of his line, and reeled up until the end of the wire entered the top ring of the rod, and so held the noose out with some degree of stiffness. Crafty Three, kneeling down, inserted the rod in the water, and very quietly and cautiously guided the noose over the head of the pike. A sudden jerk fixed the wire tight around his gills, and after a little cautious play the pike was basketed.

Of Stroke's doings there is little to be said. He managed somehow to catch a great long eel, and after this, finding his efforts unavailing, he bathed and then fell asleep on the grass, in which happy state he con-

tinued until he was awakened by a cow trying to munch his hair. He then strolled quietly homewards.

Coxswain took his sketch-book up to the high-wooded ground behind the house. From thence he had a good view of the trout stream. Struck by the eccentric movements of Bow, he stole downwards, and came upon that individual lying flat on his stomach on a ledge of rock, with his arms in the water, and too busily engaged in groping to see his coxswain. The latter crept away unperceived, carrying Bow's rod away with him, justly observing that its owner did not appear to want it.

The time for ascertaining the winner had come. Parker stood ready with a pair of scales. Coxswain sat in a big armchair, in his most important attitude.

"Now, Bow, produce your fish."

Everybody admired the speckled beauties, and envied their possessor. They weighed six pounds. Bow looked modestly conscious of his merits as an angler.

"By the way, Bow, how did you catch those fish, considering I have your rod?" said Cox.

"You beggar! Have you got my rod? I am so glad. I wouldn't have lost it for worlds. Where did you find it?"

"Where did you get your fish?"

"Oh, bother the fish! I groped for them."

Strange to say, this confession did not meet with the indignation it should have received. Stroke only looked reproachfully at his Bow, and thought of his big eel.

"Two, turn out your bag. Eight pounds—I shouldn't have thought it. Why, how hard they feel. Well! if he hasn't stuffed them full of stones. He and Bow have forfeited their chance. They may well retire into the background. Three, what have you caught? Why, look! look at the mark on his shoulders. You have snared him. Shame upon you!"

Coxswain's expostulations were drowned in an universal roar of laughter, in the midst of which long Stroke pulled out his long eel, which he had caught fairly, and he was pronounced the winner.

A merry evening closed the day. After a famous dinner, the pipes and "materials" were ordered in, and the fun by-and-by grew fast and furious.

Two volunteered a song, which he said was of his own composing. Here it is:

"WHERE THE TROUT LIE."

"Where wave the alder branches,
Shadowing o'er the stream,
And round the drooping leaflets
Changing circles gleam,
There lie the trout
So caunily.

"O'er fords of golden gravel,
Round the mossy stones,
Where thousand wavelets warble
Passing sweet in tones,
There play the trout
So merrily.

"Where moan the gurgling deeps,
Full of some great mystery
(The big trout only know
Half of their dark history),
There lurk the trout
So solemnly."

"And in all those places, boys, we follow him and take him. 'Oh, the jolly angler's life! It is the best of any,' as somebody says."

Singing once started, one after another took it up, and while the room was ringing to the chorus of "The British Lion," "Beware how you tread on his tail," the door opened, and Parker's granddaughter appeared.

"Please shall you want anything more to-night?"

"What, is it late?" said Stroke. "Come, Jenny, you must sing to us, and then we will go to bed like good boys. We won't go without."

Jenny demurred very much, but was at last prevailed upon to sing to us. She was, in fact, too timid to refuse pointblank. Silence being obtained, she began in a low sweet voice, while the fragrant evening air came in at the open window, and we could only

just see her in her white dress as she stood there in the gloaming—

> "Abide with me ; fast falls the eventide ;
> The darkness deepens ; Lord, with me abide ;
> When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me."

By the time she had finished the whole crew was quieted and softened.

"You are a good girl, Jenny," said Stroke. "I am glad you sang that. It suits the time better than the noisy songs we have been singing. Good night."

So to bed they went, and slept the sleep of the just, notwithstanding the attempts at cheating which had been made by some of the crew. As a rule, conscience is very lenient with healthy young men.

When they met the next morning at an early breakfast, each acknowledged to the others that he felt somewhat sad that the short holiday was over, and that the approaching break-up of the party was an event greatly to be deplored.

Still it was inevitable. Life could not be all play, and business had claims upon them which could not be gainsaid. A hearty meal did something towards relieving their depressed spirits. It may be a very unsentimental thing to say, but our mental troubles are very greatly assuaged by the creature comforts.

The four-oar was launched, the looms of the oars greased, the men settled themselves firmly in their seats, the coxswain took the tiller ropes in hand. "Ready—forward—row!" and the boat shot away from the "Rest" and was lost to sight around a bend in the stream.

"The Angler's Rest" has seen many pleasant gatherings, but few better friends than Bow, Two, Three, Stroke, and Cox. Yet short as the time comparatively is since the angling match, these friends are widely separated, and hear but little of each other. Do you not think they retain the memory of their meeting—the last one—at "The Angler's Rest"?

A RISE AT LAST.

XIX.

LONG-LINE FISHING OFF CROMER

Cromer—where the sun rises from, and sets in, the sea—is one of the most delightful of seaside places. It is an oasis of beauty on the uninteresting coast-line of the Eastern Counties. Its comparative inaccessibility keeps it select. The two four-horse coaches which ply daily between Norwich and Cromer do not convey the shoals of noisy excursionists which overflow Yarmouth and Lowestoft. In the months of August and September Cromer is full of the better class of seaside visitors. In those months it is as nearly perfect as a watering-place may be. Not only is there the broad expanse of sea, with the numerous vessels dotting its surface—long, low, black steamers and large ships in the distance, coasting schooners and brigs inshore, and slow moving trawlers and saucy little crab-boats with their brown

sails—but on shore are delicious walks along fragrant lanes, over breezy knolls, between ferny glades of wood, the sheeny undergrowth of fern having for close company the bright bog heather in masses of pink and purple, shaded by the thick branching oaks, and lit up here and there by brilliant shafts of sunlight. The sight of heather in a wood is sufficiently uncommon to be noticeable, even if it were not for the rich feast of colour it affords to the eye. The first view of Cromer from the Norwich road is one not easily to be forgotten. As you gain the top of the hill above the little town, there bursts upon the eye the sea, the little cluster of houses which form Cromer town hanging, as it seems, right above it; the stately church tower; the woods in the hollows; the knolls and hills covered with heath and fern and yellow gorse; the white lighthouse tower, and the meadows where the sheep and cows are tethered by ropes pegged to the ground. The view appears so suddenly that one is surprised as well as delighted.

Cromer has had a hard fight of it against the sea, which is ever making encroachments. The old church stands some distance out at sea, and the waves wash and fishes feed where parsons preached and sinners listened years ago. The old lighthouse disappeared some time since with a fall of the cliff. The set of the

tides being north and south, or nearly so, the soft material of the cliff is easily worn and carried away. When a great fall of cliffs occurs, geological specimens are often found in abundance. Remains of gigantic creatures that existed before the flood turn up again in these later days, to teach us something of the wonderful past. If there were men in those prehistoric times, they must have had an extremely uncomfortable time of it, with creatures of such devouring capacity as then existed in numbers around them. Perhaps the reason that we find no fossil skeletons of man of so ancient a date, is that they were "chawed up" by the mammoths, &c., and never allowed to die a natural death. It is a wonder the flint implements were not swallowed and digested too, instead of being allowed to remain on or in the earth, and set otherwise rational men by the ears.

Wooden breakwaters project out at intervals to break the force of the current, and the part of the cliff upon the very verge of which the village stands is faced with flint masonry — armour-plated, in fact, with stone armour. Access to the beach and jetty is gained by means of zigzag paths and steps of uncomfortable steepness. The jetty is not a very imposing structure, but it answers all the purposes for which it is intended. As Cromer has no quay, the coal vessels

take the ground at high tide, and are unloaded as rapidly as possible, several horses, however, being required to drag a cart-load up the soft beach.

Pleasant as Cromer is in the summer, it is not at all a bad place in the winter, when the days are fine enough to go out sea-fishing. I had a few days there one November, and one morning I enjoyed capital sport amongst the codlings.

The wind blew fresh the night before, and it was doubtful whether the boats would set out in the morning. I had arranged to go out with two of the fishermen, provided they started early enough to enable me to leave Cromer by midday. The morning broke with little wind and a slight smurr of rain, but the distant horizon looked soft and mellow, and there was nothing of the harshness which precedes heavy rain. We had two sets of lines for our boat. Each set was thirteen hundred yards in length, so that when the two lines were out they extended about a mile and a half. At short intervals were hooks attached to lengths of snooding. These are baited over night with, in the present instance, and indeed generally, mussels. Baiting them is not by any means a pleasant or enviable job, especially when it has to be done, as is too often the case, in the kitchen, where all the family are collected. The mussels, by the way, are caught in Lynn

deeps, and then taken to Cley and Blakeney harbour, where they are deposited in troughs to fatten and grow. From thence they are supplied to the fishermen on the coast. The lines being baited and coiled, so as to be paid out freely, are conveyed to the boats, and then you may notice a curious custom. They, and also the nets, are put in at the right-hand side of the boat, then the nets are also cast from the right-hand side of the boat, or as nearly so as practicable. A doggrel form of prayer is also said by the fishermen before the latter are cast. This faint echo of Galilee has become a superstitious observance, kept as much by the graceless blackguard as the honest man who may see a meaning in it.

The Cromer and Sherringham crab-boats are of a class which is unlike any other boat on the British coast. They are, for all the world, like the half of a walnut shell in shape. Stem and stern are pointed alike, and the shell form is further contributed to by the absence of rowlocks, instead of which are holes pierced in the top straikes. The oars are thrust through these, and when not in use the holes are stopped by corks. The oars are weighted with lead on the looms, in order to give greater leverage power. To launch a boat, an oar is passed through two opposite rowlock holes, and two men half lift half drag it down

to the water. The average length of the boat over all is about fifteen feet. They mount a large lug sail, which has to be dipped every tack, but with which they can sail very close to the wind, and at a spanking pace. A friend of mine in one of these little boats, rigged cutter fashion, has sailed around England. For sea work I cannot imagine any boat better fitted for the purpose of sailing and rowing, and also standing rough weather.

I went to bed betimes (people go to bed early in Cromer), and, as I suppose my head was full of the subject, I must needs dream about it. In my dream I foregathered with an ancient fisherman, who gave me the most copious and marvellous information upon marine matters, of which I took full notes, congratulating myself upon meeting with him. At last, however, he told me that the average length of a Cromer crab-boat was forty-three feet. This was too much, and by way of proving him wrong I used myself in default of a six-foot measure, and, turning myself over as a draper does his yard, and with the utmost gravity, measured a boat near us as two lengths and two-thirds of a length (equal to sixteen feet), and triumphed.

To return to our codlings. "Which way, skipper?" said one of the men to me. "To the southward," answered I, at a guess, seeing several boats making off

in that direction. "No, no, sir, that won't do," he replied. We pulled a mile and a half straight out to the eastward, and dropped the anchor, with the buoy rope and the end of the line attached, in seven fathoms of water, and then began the tedious work of paying out the line.

"There's a foul," I cried, seeing that a snooding was entangled round the line. "Yes, sir; but we dare not pull it in again, or it would raise the whole of the line that is already out, and foul the other snoodings." We paid half the line out, and then, making a turn, laid the rest in the opposite direction. The buoy and anchor were then let go. The other line was laid in a similar manner, and then we rowed about for an hour, to give the fish time to bite. Another boat not far off was hauling in her line. We kept her company for awhile, and watched the glittering fish being swung out of the water in rapid succession.

"Do you never get in a mess with other fellow's lines?" I asked.

"Oh yes; one boat often lays her lines over others, and then there's a lot of trouble before they can be got free."

While tossing aimlessly about, the two men began to relate for my edification unpleasant anecdotes of sea-sickness, and at length I asked,

"When are we going to take up the lines?"

"Just now, sir; we'll pull that way."

The buoy was shipped and the anchor hauled in, and then began the fun. First came a small codling, then a dab, then another codling, then nothing for several fathoms, save "five-fingers" and starfish, the latter looking most excruciatingly uncomfortable with the hooks in their stomachs and their thirteen fingers curled up around them; then a ling, and then a succession of fine codlings. If they were slightly hooked, or were very large, the "pick" or gaff was used. They were shaken off the hook very unceremoniously, and the line was carefully coiled round as it was hauled in. Soon the bottom of the boat was covered with fish of all sizes. Sometimes a heavy strain on the line would tell of a big fish, and the excitement increased as fathom after fathom was hauled in, and two or three intermediate codlings were scarcely heeded until the big one was gaffed. It took a long time before both lines were on board and it was "up and away," and by that time I was rather tired of it. It was not such good fun as hand-line fishing. There was too much of the wholesale and mechanical about it. Of course, it is more business than sport.

Our take was about ten score of all sizes, and this is about an average one. If such a take could only be

had in the summer, the men would clear a pot of money by it, but just at this season the market is glutted, and the profits less.

In fine weather, this does not seem such a bad way of getting a living; but the rough has to be taken with the smooth, and very rough and hard it is at times.

"Well, you are safe back," quoth my friend, as I jumped ashore.

"Yes, and hungry enough to eat you up." So, having first bought a 9 lb. codling for a shilling, we made our way up the "gangway" to our lodgings.

I have had variable sport with hand-lines at Cromer. I recollect one occasion, when I spent part of a summer holiday there, going out with two friends to fish with hand-lines for anything that might turn up. Sport was rather slack, so we turned our attention to practical joking. C—, being rather afraid of sea-sickness, had brought a bottle of *rum and milk* with him. It was a most extraordinary compound to take to sea, and would, one would imagine, be sufficient to upset any stomach. Probably C—, being a lawyer, had a sterner stomach than other men. He was the most patient angler of the three, and scarcely took his eyes off the line which he held in his hand. Thus he gave an excellent opportunity to abstract the bottle from his pocket and taste the contents. T— did so,

and passed it to me, and I had a sip. So had the boatmen. They seemed to like it, so we let them very nearly finish it, of course while C— was intently looking at the water. I then filled up the bottle with salt water, and replaced it. Presently C— took it out for a pull, amid our laughter. He said nothing, and before long his turn came. The tide slackened, and the lines were continually fouling each other. C—, on hauling his up, found that he had hauled T—'s hooks up with it, of which T— was quite unaware. C— immediately slipped off the large oilcloth apron he was wearing to keep off the water, and hooked it on to T—'s line, letting it slip into the water again.

"I've got such a whopper on!" by-and-by exclaimed T—. "See how he tugs. Bear a hand here, somebody."

The apron kept sheering to right and to left in the water, and T— got proportionably excited.

"Now, where's the gaff?—the line will break. It's a skate, I saw him. Here he is. Steady. Law!!!"

Amid our uproarious laughter T— sat looking, and probably feeling, more sold than he had ever done before.

If there is nothing else to do, the visitor can go out with the men to haul in the crab and lobster pots. It is a very pretty sight to see the crab-boats start out

together to the fishing grounds. You follow the large lug sails of the fleet with your eye, and all at once they suddenly disappear from view. This is caused by their lowering their sails when they arrive at the spot where the crab-pots are. You may then, on looking closely, just distinguish them as dark specks on the sea. They as suddenly reappear to the eye as the sails are hoisted, and they come sailing merrily home, the white foam flying from their bows.

I do not know whether any fishing is to be had from the pier, as at Yarmouth, or from the beach, as at Lowestoft, where the custom is to throw out lines armed with several hooks, and pegged into the sand at one end, while the other is leaded. They are thrown out by means of a stick with a notch in it. Dabs, small codlings, and bass are caught by them. I should say that both these methods might be tried with success at Cromer.

Cromer has no gas, and consequently it is a little difficult to find one's way about after dark. I recollect walking up and down the short street in which the Post-office is situate four or five times before I succeeded in finding the letter-box, and then I discovered it by feeling for it.

I have mentioned that the sun both rises from and sets in the sea, thus affording two beautiful sights each

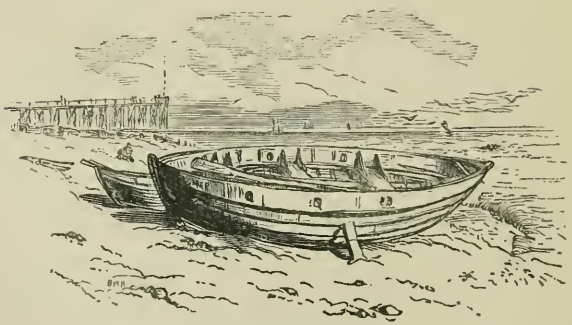
day to the lover of nature. People take a very great deal of trouble to get to mountain tops in the dark to see the sun rise. They can see it under equally beautiful, and far more comfortable, circumstances at Cromer. Not long ago I was up at half-past three in the morning, and went down to the first breakwater for a bathe. Early as I was, there was a gentleman there before me. He said he had got up at that time to see the sun rise for three mornings, and "it had not risen *satisfactorily* yet."

"What do you mean?" said I.

"Why, it rises out of a bank of clouds, and not direct from the water."

He expressed his intention to be up as early the next morning. I hope the sun rose satisfactorily then.

Cromer will be spoiled when the rail goes there.



CROMER CRAB-BOAT.

LIFE IN DEATH.

XX.

LIFE IN DEATH

Birds often choose strange nesting-places. Instances are not very rare of tomtits building in letter-boxes, pumps, and such-like erections which are in constant use. Only the other day I read that a robin's nest was found in the pocket of a labourer's coat which had been hanging up in an outbuilding for some time. To the credit of the owner of the coat, the birds were

allowed to hatch their eggs and bring up their young. Thrushes often build their large and conspicuous nests in what would appear to be anything but safe places. Last spring I saw a wagtail's nest built under the sill of a bay window of a public-house, just outside a room where noisy dances were often carried on, and above the entrance to a skittle alley. Not only was the wagtail so fearless, but a cuckoo also laid her egg in the nest, and the young cuckoo was hatched, and of course looked at many times a day by curious eyes.

Perhaps the strangest nesting-place chosen by any bird is that depicted in the sketch at the top of this article. A human skull, a stray from a neglected private museum, was lying in some out-of-the-way corner in a garden, and a wren built her nest in it. The skull is in the possession of my friend Harcourt, who made the sketch from it.

What a subject this presents to moralize upon! The head that once was the birthplace of so many thoughts, to be now the birthplace of innocent little birds. The head that once felt so many hopes and fears, so many anxieties and troubles, to again have within it, in the persons of the wrens, the joys and cares of a family. Just imagine the contrast between then and now. Did the man who owned that head ever think, as he trod the pavement in all the vigour of life, of the

ultimate fate of his headpiece—to be the nursery of a bird. Faugh! it makes one shudder to think of. One is used to the idea of worms and corruption and decay, but not to the thought that one's head should be so used. It is worse than to be made a skeleton of and hung up in a museum for the advancement of science.

The sketch is an exact delineation of the position of the skull and the nest, and shows how the bird entered. I forget how many eggs were laid, but it was rather more than the usual number.

XXI.

HARVEST-TIME

THE welcome warmth of the summer sun has yellowed
the waving corn,
And over a golden billowy sea the south wind greets
the morn;
Wealth and plenty all over the land have fallen in
gentle rain,
And the breezes murmur their requiems soft o'er the
sheeny waves of grain.

In the healthful life of the early dawn the reapers go
forth to mow;
Before the sweep of the long scythe blade the sorrow-
ing ears lie low.
A sigh and a moan go over the fields like to the
softened roar
Of the saddening voice of the distant waves that surge
on the lonely shore.

The noontide comes with its glaring heat, and the
earth lies breathless and still;
The breeze has fallen, a haze has risen, that blots out
valley and hill;
The birds in the wood have ceased their song, the
sleepy murmur of bees
Is the only sound we hear in the heat, amidst the
motionless trees.

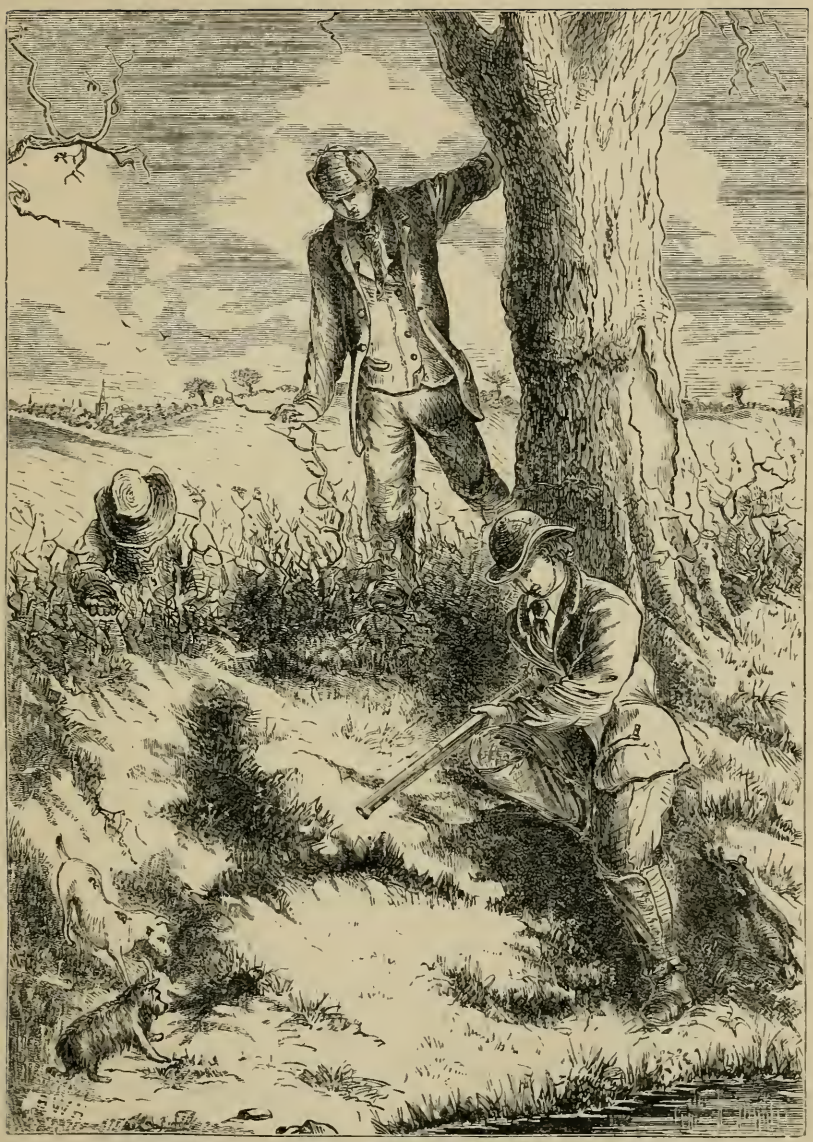
The evening nears, and the weary team is toiling
adown the lane
Where arching hazels seem whispering words of mys-
tery to the grain.
A mellowing light falls over all from the fast westering
sun,
And silent thanks are given to God as the long day's
work is done.

Now all the valley is filled with mist, an ocean with
island trees,
And queenly and clear the harvest moon looks down
on shadowy seas
With holy light and a holy calm, and across the gazer's
soul
Glad thoughts of the harvest-time of Life in long pro-
cession roll.

XXII.

RABBITING

Rabbiting is the third stage in the shooter's progress. The first may be taken to be the surreptitious practice with pistols at marks, at an age when our fond mothers believed we possessed no such dangerous toys. Then comes the hedge-popping stage, when blackbirds and thrushes, fieldfares and redwings, with sometimes an incautious woodpigeon, formed our prey. It is a question, too, whether those hedge-popping days did not give us the best sport of all. It needed a quick shot to stop a blackbird as it just topped the hedge, and was lost to sight the other side. The long and careful stalks, too, from hedge to hedge, after a flock of redwings and fieldfares, presented all the elements on a smaller scale that are contained in a grander sport; and as we were smaller ourselves, and much more



RABBITING.

easily satisfied than we are now, why, I think I am not far wrong in saying that we enjoyed our humble sport then quite as well as we have more ambitious sport since. Then, when we aspire to rabbit shooting, we consider ourselves to be fully fledged sportsmen, wanting only the opportunity to distinguish ourselves at anything, from battue shooting to deerstalking.

I can well remember the first rabbit I killed. We were ferreting for rats under a haystack, when a rabbit unexpectedly bolted out. I had that day been entrusted with a double-barrelled gun. I fired the first barrel off somewhere or other, being in too much of a hurry to take aim. Fortunately I hit nobody. With the second barrel I managed by a wonderful fluke to hit bunny and lay him kicking on the grass. My second rabbit gave me far more trouble. It frequented the flues under an old brickmaking shed, and when the ferret was put into one of these flues, the rabbit just popped out of the other end of the flue and into the next one as quick as lightning. We went there for three evenings before we could make him give a clean bolt, and then we shot him.

In some respects it is fortunate that the rabbit is so prolific, for he is very relentlessly pursued. Farmers, of course, are not very fond of them, and the tenant farmers should always be allowed by their landlords

to kill as many of them as they like, upon condition of their preserving the winged game and hares. It may be as well where the preserving is very strict not to allow them to be shot, as it is a very hard thing for a man, when he has a gun in his hand, to resist the temptation of taking a sly shot at a hare or a covey of partridges when nobody is looking. Trapping and ferreting the rabbits ought, however, to be always allowed. With the aid of ferrets we have long odds against the poor rabbits. The very scent of a ferret entering a burrow is sufficient to start bunny off, if he is not aware that there are other ememies waiting for him outside. Then he will not bolt until he is absolutely compelled. Ferrets and rabbiting are so closely concerned, that it may not be amiss if I say a few words concerning the former. Any boy reading this chapter may thank me for a few practical hints, which those who have no interest in them can skip. It is no easy matter to keep ferrets in good condition, and it is still harder to rear a litter of young ones successfully. Useful information, too, is hard to get, as I found when I used to keep ferrets, which I did much against the wish of my people at home. I confess to feeling a liking for these useful little animals, and I used to pet them so much, that they grew quite fond of me, and would let me do what

I liked with them. I never got bitten at all badly, but I have seen some very severe and dangerous bites received by persons who have incautiously handled them. In taking up ferrets, seize them quickly and surely by the neck. If you hesitate, and keep poking at them, you are sure to get bitten. It is just the same as dealing with a savage dog. If he sees that you are afraid of him he will snap at you. If you approach him boldly he will admit your superiority. Ferrets should be kept in a large hutch, divided into two compartments—one for sleeping in, and the other for feeding and exercise. It should be kept scrupulously clean and dry; and, as ferrets are very clean and tidy animals, this may be easily done. Cleanliness is the sure preventative against footrot, that plague of the ferret-keeper. Hay is often given to ferrets to lie in, but it is apt to make them unhealthy, and I prefer straw, or better still, soft pine wood shavings, the odour from which keeps away insects. Feed the ferrets with bread and milk, and now and then a little fresh meat, offal, &c. If from any cause they are low in condition, and ill, and you can procure a dead cat, give them that. It will fatten them up and restore them to health in a surprising manner. When the female is about to have young ones, separate her from the male, and on no account

disturb her by looking at her or touching her until the young ones can run about and eat meat, or she will kill them.

It is best to muzzle ferrets when they are used, as otherwise they may catch a rabbit in its burrow, and, after satisfying their hunger, curl themselves up and go to sleep. If such a thing does happen, a light charge of powder fired down the burrow may bring them out. If it does not, you can only set some one to watch the hole, and wait with patience for its coming out.

The cruel plan of muzzling them by sewing up the mouth should never be followed. Here are two methods perfectly efficacious and harmless. "Tie a piece of soft string round the neck of the ferret close to the head, and leave two rather long ends. Tie another piece round the under jaw, passing it under the tongue, and then around over the upper jaw, where tie it; also leaving long ends. The mouth being thus closed, tie all the ends together in one knot on the top of the head." Or, "Double a piece of string and tie a small loop, which place on the top of the head with the knot on the neck. Pass the ends of the string around the neck, and tie a second knot under the jaws; then pass over the nose, where make a third knot, and finally tie the ends through

the loop at the top of the head so as to make all secure."

I prefer the last mode of doing it, as being more simple than the other.

On fine September and October days, when the air is bracing and the day bright, an afternoon's rabbiting is productive of much fun. Where there are many burrows the nets will probably be used to aid the gun. There is great art in fixing a rabbit net across a burrow, so that bunny, when he pops out like a cannon ball from a gun, shall be caught in its folds, and not merely dash it aside. When he is in it he must be pounced upon at once, or he may struggle free.

Whether we take part in a rabbit battue in some well preserved woods, or are satisfied with an occasional shot at bunny as he goes louping over the gorse of a free common, he is sure to afford sport. What I like best is a lazy saunter with a gun along the hedgerows and the edges of the coppices, quietly stealing up within shot, or coming suddenly upon the rabbits around corners.

I have often also watched for them at dusk, ensconsed behind a hedge or up a tree, waiting until they come out of their burrows to feed. The most artistic mode of shooting them then is with a pea rifle.

And, lastly, I have seen famous fun when the reaping machine has left only a small patch of corn standing in the centre of a field, in which the rabbits are gathered in numbers. Oh, the fun of chevying them with sticks and stones as they bolted out, and the roars of laughter when two fellows charged the same rabbit and came into collision with each other, or fell headlong on the grass!

XXIII.

A DAY'S PIKE FISHING IN NORFOLK

I HAD not handled a rod for over eighteen months, and the love of fishing, born in me, slumbered quietly, only breaking out occasionally when some piscatorial friend boasted of his exploits. I had literally had no leisure to pursue the angler's idle art, and long disuse had brought with it a *quasi* forgetfulness of its delights and allurements. But a few bracing days one February, an almost accidental overhauling of some pike tackle, and last, but not least, the sight of a brace of twenty-pound pike in the Norwich fish market, made me determine to have at least one day among the pike before the season closed. And a right pleasant day I had. Not a successful day as Norfolk fishing days go, but successful enough to satisfy one who had not fished for so long. Most of my papers have the

glorious border-land of Wales for their battle-field, and it is one of the greatest changes conceivable to come from Wales to Norfolk. From crags and hills to marish flats and gently undulating meadows; from dashing torrents and crystal streams to slowly creeping rivers and sleeping dykes, such as would make the lament of the dying swan doubly mournful, floated he down their oily waters; from salmon and trout to pike and bream; from deep bays hemmed in by frowning headlands, whence the seafowl clang and sweep, to a bare coast that trends away right and left in monotonous flatness. Such is the change and contrast. Yet there is a charm in the evidences of superior cultivation and farming in Norfolk. There is a beauty in the marshes even, that stretch far away with their many-coloured grasses, of ever-changing sheen, as the cloud-shadows fleet over them and the wind sways them into billowy undulations. The cattle stand and lie in picturesque groups, and the wherries on the rivers, the windmills on the banks, and the semi-Dutch river-side houses lend a foreign look to the scene, as viewed by an unaccustomed eye.

I availed myself of an invitation for a day's pike fishing at Buxton, on the river Bure, or North River, and drove over with my friend the previous evening. One of the first questions to the man on our arrival was—

"What sort of bait have you got?"

"About a dozen small gudgeon, sir, and one 'flat'" (a small bream).

"That won't do. You must take the nets the first thing in the morning and get some more."

Over our grog and pipes we had a long and pleasant chat, and Mr. G— showed me a form of gorge bait tackle which was new to me, and may be new to some of my readers. The brass wire of the ordinary gorge hook is cut away, and the gimp fastened to the thickest part or shoulder of the lead, either by drilling a hole through or otherwise. The lead is then pushed inside the bait, and the gimp is brought with a needle out at its shoulder. Mr. G— informed me that a hook so baited is much more killing than a hook baited in the ordinary fashion, and I can quite believe it, as its gyrations in the water would be much more varied; but I fancy it would be much more likely to catch in the weeds. I intend to try it at the first opportunity, and report upon it. In the "draws," I believe, the bait will spin capitally.

The morning came, dull and cloudy, with a strong wind and promise of rain, which promise was pretty liberally fulfilled. From the window we could see the men with the casting-net far down the river, and presently we went to meet them, my host, a man of

fifty, challenging me to jump the wide ditches, which challenge I declined, on account of an ankle still weak from an old sprain. The baits consisted of small gudgeons, too small for our tackle and the clouded water, and one small bream, which Mr. G— put on his flight, with the object of tempting a big fish, which lay in a bend of the river above the mills. The boat was taken through the lock to a broad reach of water, above where the "channel" was from six to eight feet in depth, and the "fleet" (Norfolk for shallow) was free from weeds. It was past eleven o'clock when we embarked, and the wind had risen to a regular gale, which blew up stream, and sent us along at such a rate that it was sometimes necessary to back water to prevent the baits coming to the surface. We trailed this reach up and down through pouring rain, and hard work it was for the man who rowed us. Mr. G— and I sat one at each end of the boat, and when one or other of us stood up, the wind would "slew" the boat around, to our boatman's intense disgust.

Landing Mr. G— by the boathouse to spin for his big fish, which had escaped him some time ago, I went on, and soon struck and landed a nice little fish of three pounds. This appears to be an excellent reach for pike and perch, and Mr. G— told me of an enormous catch of bream he once had there. The day was

so wretched that we could not possibly expect good sport, yet I had two or three more runs there, and Mr. G— landed another small jack. At half-past one we left off for a feed, and afterwards drove to Brampton, a spot higher up the river; and in the tail water below Burgh Mills it seemed as if we were going to make up for the previous ill luck. It was well on in the afternoon, and the rain had ceased. Almost at the first cast I had a run, and landed a fish. A few yards lower down another fish broke away three times, and I hooked and landed him the fourth. In another half-dozen yards I got hold of "the largest fish of the day," and of course he broke away, the gimp parting at a strain of certainly not over two pounds. I could not get a sight of the fish, so I could not speculate as to his weight. With him went the only spinning flight I had that would do for the small baits we were using, so I put on a gorge hook, and immediately had a run in the same spot, and I believe from the same fish; but he refused to pouch it. I signalled to the boy who carried the gudgeons (which were in a pail half full of water), and who was some distance off, and proceeded to unloose my trace. Looking around again, I saw Mr. G— and the boy engaged in groping among the grass. Fearing the worst, I hurried up, and found that the unlucky urchin had got the pail between his

legs in his hurry, and tumbled over it, shooting its contents into a ditch. All our bait was gone just as the pike were on the feed. It was no use crying over "spilt milk," so I rummaged up an old bait, and with it caught another jack. Then we had to leave off. Mr. G— had caught two in the mill-tail; and if our bait had not vanished we might have had several more, as the pike had suddenly commenced feeding well. They refused, however, to look at the spoon bait, although the American pattern, with a tuft of red wool over the hooks, is generally very killing among the pike and perch in Norfolk waters. As it was, we left off with seven jack; none of them large. I saw enough of the water to believe that it contains some heavy fish, and I am informed that such is the case. As the river is navigable some distance further up, the weeds are kept down, and the absence of bushes on the bank renders it delightfully easy work spinning. Above Burgh Mills is a long reach of water, where some heavy fish lie. The season had been so mild, that the fish were even then heavy in spawn and inactive, and the pike season closed much earlier than usual that year. Several very heavy fish were caught in the preserved waters in Norfolk the same season, the heaviest in those waters, where it is the custom to turn in all those under three pounds or so.

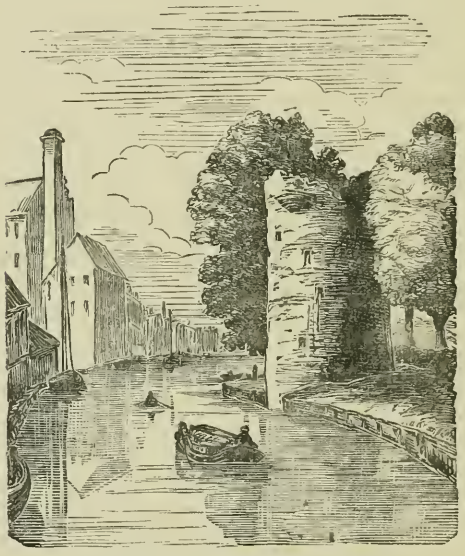
In the borderland of Wales and other districts, where the scenery is varied and interesting, it is no great hardship to have poor sport; but in Norfolk one depends entirely on the sport for pleasure, especially in the winter. At eventide there is certainly some beauty in the undulating fields and woods half shrouded in the gloaming, and in the long stretch of ploughland rising in gradually deepening purple, until it is outlined with a line of intense black against the stormy orange sky, on which a long low line of olive-green cloud is resting. Undoubtedly there are many pretty spots in Norfolk, but they do not usually come in the way of the angler, and, failing a heavy catch, he has nothing but sluggish stream and steaming marsh with which to solace himself.

I should mention a formidable instrument found in the bottom of the boat, and sent to me afterwards by Mr. G—, who thought it belonged to me. It consisted of a large bullet fixed to the end of a strip of whale-bone from an umbrella, and had evidently been used for stunning fish, for which it is admirably adapted. I would recommend its adoption by the humane angler.

In spite of wind and rain I had a most pleasant day. I can certainly say one thing in favour of the Norfolk people, and that is, that they are extremely hospitable

—as far, at least, as my experience of them goes, and that is not a little.

I returned to Norwich the next morning by coach from Horstead. Norfolk is still in the dark as far as railways are concerned, and smacks considerably of the "olden time" in its means of locomotion.



OLD TOWER ON THE YARE, NORWICH.

XXIV.

A WHIFF OF THE SEA

Who has not felt at times an insatiable longing to escape from the monotony of one's ordinary occupation and rush off to the nearest watering-place for a sight of the grand old sea and a whiff of the bracing winds which blow over it? What visions cross the brain as we sit fagged and weary by the light of the midnight lamp, of the bonny wild waves sparkling in the sun; of flowery slopes between the precipitous cliffs; of sea-birds swooping from rocky ledges, and of magnificent sunsets behind the level sea! And what a relief, say, on a Saturday to close the book, throw down the pen, lock up the papers, and speed as fast as the train can carry us to the realization of our wishes. Oh, the sweetness of such brief holidays, all the pleasanter because short and few and far between! A

holiday, methinks, should never be prolonged until the freshness has worn off.

It is even an advantage to be a bachelor in taking such brief excursions. There is no better half to interfere with one's arrangements, or be cross because she cannot accompany us. It does not take long to pack up, and I take care to put in a case of sea-fishing tackle, in view of probable requirements. The beauty of only having oneself to consult is, that one need not decide where to go until the last moment, and accordingly it is only as I arrive at the ticket office that I decide upon Borth. There, at least, I shall be quiet, and I feel just now as if that were the greatest desideratum. Well, here I am in the train; and, as my habit is while travelling, I examine myself, as it were, as to whether things at home are left in proper trim, if I have everything I want, and how many changes I shall have to make and where? Then to settle down quietly to the perusal of my paper or a comfortable nap.

On we speed through mountain scenery which grows wilder every mile; past leaping cataracts which almost seem to overhang the line, woods which grow more stunted as we near the sea; villages which grow more picturesque and, alas! more dirty, until it is getting dusk and the rhythmic rattling of the train has resolved itself into a song with regular cadences, lulling

the mind until the whilom active thoughts grow wandering and the senses duller. I am awaked from a sound sleep by a gust of wind through the open window, carrying with it the unmistakeable odour of the sea. There it is, that long grey line like a wall just discernible in the summer twilight over the hazy marsh. What a luxury it is to take in breath after breath of the fresh breeze, so invigorating and spirit-cheering after the sultry inland air! Now we pass by the side of the Dovey, and over its sands the white seabirds are flying, the highest of them having the crimson of the sunset still reflected on their breasts. How weird their cries sound in the gloaming! Along the edge of a dyke six herons stand solemnly in a row, a most unusual sight, for generally speaking a heron loves his own company better than that of his brethren. On a sandbank in the estuary are grouped a number of sooty cormorants, and over the nearest marsh the lapwings sweep and toss, and scream in rare affright at the gunner walking beneath them.

Borth at last; and after replenishing the inner man and refreshing the outer with a wash, I turn out for a stroll along the edge of the waves, and listen to their inspiriting music. The long subdued murmur of the summer sea and the dreamy plash of its waves are to my mind the pleasantest of nature's sounds. In them

there is a music and poetry that is almost human in its expression. A grand teacher is the sea. By its side the thoughts seem to have freer range and larger scope; and by the inspiration born of it many a noble word has been written and spoken, and many readers and hearers have indirectly felt its influence. But see, the horizon is no longer visible. You cannot tell where the sea ends and sky begins. The vessels in the offing seem floating in the air. The lights in the villages are disappearing fast. "The day has ended, the night has descended," and I retire to rest, with the window of my room wide open to catch the faintest breeze from the sea and to let in its "voices of the night" to be my lullaby.

With the daylight I am up, and in the sea, sporting with the buoyant waves; now floating on my back and letting them toss me where they will, and then striking out vigorously through the cool, clear water. It is half an hour of exquisite and unalloyed enjoyment.

Let us see what manner of place Borth is. To the north is the estuary of the Dovey, with its banks of yellow sand, and on the further side is a town with a musical name—Aberdovey—and, as the song says, musical bells. I do not know whether they are so or not, but certain it is that bells always sound sweeter

and mellower by the water's side, and the sound of their pealing is very beautiful when it comes over a wide stretch of the sea on a quiet sabbath morn. Beyond Aberdovey the hills rise in long green slopes to meet the blue sky. Southward are beetling, dark-brown cliffs, against which the sea always dashes as if in fury at the sudden check, and when there is the least wind, sends up columns of white spray. Between the estuary and the cliffs is a long curve of coast, with a firm sandy beach, most delightful to walk upon or bathe from. Above that is a steep bank of pebbles, the protecting boundary of the road and adjacent moor. Near the Dovey are dry, sandy dunes, covered with scant herbage, and here the rabbits literally swarm. I believe that visitors staying at *the* Hotel can obtain leave to shoot in this warren. To the west is of course the sea; and inland, with a great sweep and curve far back to the foot of its bordering hills, stretches a morass, once very wild and dangerous, but now being gradually drained and cultivated. It is worth while to venture a little way on this bog at night, to listen to the strange cries of the different birds. You will hear the shrill whistle of the curlew, the wilder scream of the lapwing, the hoarse croak of the coot, the sharper call of the water-hen, and sometimes the hollow booming of the bittern. In the winter you will also

hear the whistlings and callings of the different species of wildfowl. There are always, too, numberless inexplicable noises, some of birds and small animals, whose note you cannot recognize, and other mysterious sounds which apparently come from the bog itself, and are produced no one knows how.

The small river which runs through this bog holds plenty of river and sea trout. I recollect one very hot day having good sport there with the worm. The water (in the higher reaches) was so brilliantly clear, that they would not look at a fly, and in my despair I went to a farmyard and dug up a lot of red worms. These the trout rushed at furiously; and ere long I had made a good basket, and that on a day when most anglers would laugh at the idea of taking a rod in hand.

In the winter the wildfowl shooting along the estuary and on the marsh is rather above the average.

After breakfast I go to the old little church by the sea, for the only English service of the day. As I reach it the clerk is turning out a religiously inclined pig, which has taken it into its head to go to church also. It is quite amusing to see the number and obtrusiveness of the pigs in all the Welsh fishing villages. Like the Irishman's pig, they are quite at home everywhere.

The churchyard is a sad record of deaths by drowning. The storm that caused the wreck of the Royal Charter made thirteen widows in this little village. There is scarcely a fireside which has not a chair made vacant by the beautiful, cruel sea.

In the evening curiosity leads me into a Welsh chapel; and if ever earnestness and simple rugged piety were shown in men's faces, they are shown in that homely fisher congregation. Although I cannot understand a word, I yet can understand the influence of the vigorous sermon with which the minister with the ill-cut habiliments keeps the listeners, as it were, spell-bound for the best part of an hour. The attention of the people is unwavering, save when a strange sail comes within sight of the windows—every eye watches her while in view.

As I want to have a try at the mackerel in the morning, I must see about engaging a boat. I accordingly make my way down the long, straggling street of the village towards the place where they are all drawn up on the beach. I often stop on the way to listen to the plaintive Cambrian melodies that are crooned out by the peat fires; but the smell of the peat smoke, which is very unpleasant to me, drives me at last down to the shore. Here I come upon an old sailor who is sitting on the stones and looking out to sea with his glass. I

sit down by him and enter into conversation, as I love to do with old men, by sea and land. Their experience of the world is always worth listening to. He points out to me the best boat.

"Where shall I find her owner?"

"His name is Thomas Jones. He lives at the furthest cottage in that row of white houses. Good night, sir. I am very dry to-night, sir."

"Then take a dip in the sea."

"Ah, I mean dry inside. Thank you, sir."

What a shame it is that the lower classes should expect a gratuity, or "tip," for every trifling service they render you. What if the same principle were extended higher up in the world? Would there not be an outcry?

By Jove! there is a woman in a Welsh hat. One of the real old-fashioned sort—true beaver. Before the railway reached Borth, and cheap excursions were instituted, these hats were not such a rare sight as they are now; but the last five or six years have witnessed their almost total extinction, and a bad exchange has been made for tawdry imitations of modern bonnets, in which the Welsh maidens do not look half so comely as formerly.

I reach Thomas Jones' cottage—built of stone, by the way, and not of turf, like many of the humbler

dwellings. I knock, and in answer to some words in Welsh, which I take to be "Come in," I open the door, and am nearly blinded by the sudden rush of peat smoke out of the heated room. When I am sufficiently recovered to see, I make the necessary arrangements with Thomas Jones, an old man who has just got out of bed to speak to me. In the same room are other beds, from which the whole family, male and female, are staring at the intruder. I am glad to get out into the breeze again, and I wonder how I should feel if I had to go to bed at half-past eight o'clock, because there was nothing else to do.

What a magnificent sunset over the sea and Bardsey Island! One could almost fancy it the storming of a city. Lurid flames seem springing from above the battlemented rocks, and shoot upwards till they render still more lurid the masses of smoke-like clouds which hang over in fantastic forms. The crests of the waves sparkle red, like the helmets of soldiers hastening to the assault, and the thunder of the surf, caused by the rising wind, breaking upon the cliffs, sounds like the terrible roar of a bombardment. Then, as the crimson fades out of the sky and the cries of the seabirds ring over the sands, the closing scene—the sacking of the city and the screams of the women—is strongly pictured.

The morning comes drizzly and cold, a contrast to yesterday. I saunter down to where the boat is waiting for the tide. We are off at last; and, after beating out a couple of miles to windward, we make towards Aberystwith. Two lines with silver spinners attached are trailed behind us, but for a long time we get no bites. The day turns out gusty and showery. Sometimes we sit upon the weather gunwale, to keep the boat up under a strong gust. Ours is the only boat out to-day. At other times when the wind lulls we barely creep along, plunging heavily in the swell, the old man whistling softly to himself for a breeze. To my mind it is glorious, sailing along under the cliffs, black, brown, and grey, with emerald patches here and there, where a marshy ravine runs down to the sea. Still we get no bites, and Aberystwith is close to. We turn, and are half-way back to Borth with like ill success. Suddenly the line I hold is tugged at by something. I haul in a lovely mackerel glittering like silver and precious stones. The fun now begins in earnest. One after another we pull the fish in, the old man and I, while his son looks after the sails. Scarcely has the lead time to sink before the electric thrill of a bite is felt. The basket fills rapidly, and the cry is "still they come." I am looked upon as a lucky man, for no fish have been caught for a long time. I have no

doubt the men would, as they say, take me out again for nothing, could I stay another day.

All things pleasant have an end. Through a little careless steering the boat has fallen off from the wind, without the sheet being loosened, and a sudden gust striking with great force the flat surface of the sail, the mast gives way—being, I suppose, rather rotten—and, breaking off close by the thwart, goes overboard with a crash. The helm is put hard over in an instant, but the hamper of the fallen sail prevents her head coming up to the wind, so I get out an oar and pull her stern to leeward while the men get the wreck in. It was very nearly a capsize, and I have kicked off my boots to be ready for a swim. Happily that was not needed; but our mackerel fishing is cut short, and, as the sea is too heavy for rowing at the pace required, we run into a quiet cove for shelter. There I leave them and walk back to Borth along the top of the cliff.

Home again now, leaning out of the carriage window to take my last whiff of the sea; we speed back through the wooded valleys and level cornlands, reaching too soon the hot and stuffy town.

XXV.

THE ANGLER'S WINTER

When the landscape is a "watercolour-painter's landscape"—that is, when Autumn browns and reds and yellows take the place of the summer green, which, while it is so charming in its freshness in the country itself, is so strangely wanting in beauty in a picture—the angler's work is nearly done. No longer does he ramble fly rod in hand by the purling trout-stream, down which float, instead of May-flies, the brown dead leaves. The trout, so plump and bright-scaled in the spring and summer, are now becoming "long and lank and brown," as their spawning season draws near. Regretfully the trusty wand is laid up in its winter quarters, after being well oiled for protection against extreme dryness. For want of this precaution I have known many a rod snap in the most unaccountable

manner when first used the following season. Looking through one's fly book at the array of tried and well-proved lures; the polish taken off them as an angler loves to see it, the gut frayed and limp; what memories do they not recall! This one caught you that heavy basket of red-spotted beauties on that mild spring day, when the gentle south wind wafted white cloudlets across the sky and mellowed the sun glare, and raised a ripple on the still deeps that made every part fishable: when it was a perfect luxury to be out in the fresh spring beauty and by the side of a river which flowed so musically over its clean pebbly beds and between its worn old rocks: when the little cascades gleamed silvery white, and the eddies beneath them whirled about the snowlike foam, and then shot away in streams of sheeny blue and purple and black: when, above all, the river was alive with trout; splashes all over the surface where the trout leaped at the dancing gnats; quiet circles where the drowning March-browns were sucked quietly in; and now and then the heavy plunge of a big fish. Most actively at work all the day long! yet there was time to feel the outward beauty. Although the arm and wrist ached sorely, yet it was impossible to leave off until the night shadows came on. Look at this rough green-bodied fly with a black hackle sparingly twisted around

it! Do you not remember when that was made—and used for the first and only time?—Shut your eyes, and it all comes before you as plainly as if a painter had limned it. The hot, bright day—so hot and bright, that it was hard to find coolness or shade anywhere. The river low and clear, and the fish most decidedly not on the feed. You are sitting on a sloping slab of limestone, the lower end of which is laved by the water. Above you is a high steep rock which gives you welcome shade, and is festooned with ferns,—harts-tongue, and maiden-hair, in luxuriant clusters. On the grey limestone and the vivid green vegetation the corruscating reflections of light from the sparkling wavelets play like myriads of fairy shuttles shooting to and fro and weaving a brilliant web. On a boulder in midstream a dipper sits, ever and anon making a dive into the stream and reappearing a yard or so above the stone, and floating back to it to resume its position. Happy dipper! so cool this hot day, and enjoying a bathe without the trouble of undressing. Suddenly a caterpillar falls *pat* on the water from a tree overhead. Writhing in evident discomfort at his sudden change of element, he is carried away by the stream. All at once there is a regular "boil" in the water as a big trout rushes at him! The hint is not lost. As you fail to find another caterpillar, you make

the best imitation you can from the materials in your fly book; and the big trout, trusting to secure another tasty morsel, rises incautiously at it, and finds that he has "caught a tartar." This black hackle enticed a hungry salmon whom you were *not* seeking to capture, and your slight trout rod had its work cut out to land him. That white fluffy fly brought to basket the famous trout which used to lurk beneath the buttresses of the grey old bridge, and defied scores of anglers who from the roadway above had spent hours and hours employing their most seductive wiles. But you, in the still summer evening when the gloaming was darkening the valley, half waded half swam to the ledge of rock at the foot of the massive buttress, and while from the deep dark pool sounded faint but numerous splashes of rising fish, you quietly and cautiously "dibbed" your "white moth" on the water, and secured the four-pounder, which half the population of the little village came to see the next day, and you walked about, the hero of the hour.

Such reveries and memories will turn the veriest winter's day into summer; but not all the angler's winter is so passed. In late autumn and early winter are still, mild days when such leaves as have still to fall, fall straight down to the ground, neither wafted this way nor that by the faintest breath of wind. The

water's surface is quiet and unrippled, and the water is very black and clear. On such days the big old roach come on the feed. The cunning old fellows that during the summer only come furtively and at night from the fastnesses of their deep holes, and are too deep and crafty to be often tempted by the angler's bait, now seem to have lost some of their caution. Either the cold sharpens their hunger or the river is less disturbed by bipeds, or whatever the reason is, these big old roach may be taken pretty easily in the noontime of these fine open winter days. I recollect a spot where we used to catch some very fine ones. It was where a trout stream, dammed up by a millpool, flowed quietly and canal-like under the road—a quiet country one. The stream was spanned by a low brick bridge, so low as to be a culvert merely, for the water reached to within six inches of the top of the arch. We discovered it in this wise. We had been spinning with a spoon bait for jack in a neighbouring canal, without success, and in the faint hope of securing some gudgeons, as a more attractive bait, we put on a worm tackle, and, fishing off the road, quickly saw the float dip in the quiet way in which a roach moves it. To our astonishment, a roach of three-quarters of a pound in weight was the result. Afterwards we made many journeys to the place, and baiting with wasp grubs,

which had been carefully baked and kept in the cellar on dry straw since the storming of the nest in the summer, we generally had good sport; but *only* in the winter. In the summer the fish seemed to have moved away, or at all events only the very small ones would bite. We would let the float swim quietly, in company with dead leaves and sticks, through the scum which generally formed at the head of the culvert, as far underneath as it would go, and upon pulling it up again we often found that we had a fish on. That was in Shropshire, but I would particularly mention that in the Norfolk waters this season of the year is prolific. If Mr. Francis still wants to catch a two-pounder, let him try his hand in some of the nineteen-feet deep holes in the narrow Yare above Harford and Cringleford bridges, or in the Bure by Buxton. Nor are roach the only members of the finny tribe which are "getatable." Chub (and carp, also, they say, although I have never succeeded in catching any in the winter, albeit I fished in perhaps the best stocked piece of water in England) will also take the bait. But the charm of chub fishing is not now. There is none of the delicious wandering from deep to deep and picking up a fish here and there from the scores basking under the fringing willows. Steady, patient angling in deep holes alone will produce success.

Happy is the angler who lives near a grayling river! He need not hide away his fly rod until Christmas. He will take advantage of fine midday hours to flog the cold, steely-blue fords, and consider himself repaid if a brace of sheeny grayling rewards his efforts. Alas for their rarity! grayling are so seldom met with, in comparison with trout. But possibly if they were more common they would cease to be so prized as they are now. We may as well be thankful for small mercies.

Pike and perch are, however, the stock fish of the angler in the winter. The largest perch may now be taken by spinning; while pike fishing, so that it be trolling or spinning, and not live baiting, is to my mind the most exhilarating pastime possible to the angler at this season of the year. To issue forth on a bracing, windy day; to wander by the river side, which even in winter is a delightful place, is of itself pleasant, if taken as a walk merely. But when to this is added the constant exercise of wielding a heavy pike rod, the excitement of anticipation and the still keener excitement of hooking, playing, and landing a heavy fish, while healthful breezes boisterously embrace one, bringing a ruddier glow to the cheek and a clearer white to the eye, a firmer tread to the foot and greater vigour to the brain, why, then I say that we

may be thankful winter *has* come and brought with it so much keen enjoyment. Pike, too, are not so tender as to be influenced by the wind having a touch of the east in it. Nay, sometimes they run all the better when the wind is most piercingly cold. He is not a bad specimen of a muscular Christian who says, in his Ode to the North-East wind—

> "Jovial wind of winter,
> Turn us out to play;
> Sweep the golden reed beds,
> Crisp the lazy dyke,
> Hunger into madness
> Every plunging pike."

Every one, however, has not the taste for such rough enjoyments, or perhaps has not the physical strength necessary for their perfect enjoyment. For him, then, there is the pleasure of taking a stroll in an idle hour by river or mere side. Every angler knows what it is to picture to himself how he would fish such a spot! what a likely hole this seems for a pike, and that a sure find for a shoal of perch! how that bend of the river could be cast over without getting entangled in the overhanging bushes! what a capital place this would be to land the fish which are sure to lie under the shelter of that submerged tree! and so on. What numerous plans are formed for next year's excursions—most of them, alas! in all probability, will not be carried out—

and what crafty expedients will be tried to capture the big fish that have escaped us before. A winter afternoon passes pleasantly in such imaginings. One learns a great deal, too, in such rambles. The water is often very clear, and the frost has cut the weeds down so that one learns the topography of the river bed, and the exact locale of the "homes" of the fish.

There are days, however, when even this resource is not available; but, as it is unlikely that any man is an angler and nothing else, then other occupations come in. In the evenings, or when he is inclined to read, there are no end of books upon his favourite sport with which he may console himself—moving adventures of innumerable sportsmen on flood and field, "mountain, meadow, and mere." If he has literary tastes, he may write upon his favourite sports, and so not only gain publicity and pelf, but, what is far more valuable, the acquaintance and friendship of kindred spirits, with whom otherwise he would not have foregathered.

However the angler's winter be spent, I hope that it is with my readers—with whom I thus endeavour to chat, as it were "across the walnuts and the wine"—a merry and a happy one.

THE STILE.

XXVI.

A NOVEMBER AFTERNOON

A PALL of blue-black cloud that darkens all the wold,
A dense wall in the east, and stretching far
Beyond the zenith. 'Neath it autumn winds blow cold,
And birds sit silent, waiting for the war
Of elements. Then suddenly the sun gleams out
Low down the west, suffusing all with light;
In one sweet burst of song the birds exultant shout,
And fairy beauty greets our dazzled sight.

Each leaf of yellow, red, or brown is turned to gold,
And scattered ivy gleams like emerald.
As metal pieces fall, the leaves drop on the wold,
And waving rods of fire to heaven are held,
As branches catch the light against the awful gloom.
The cloud drops lower still: then falls the dark of doom.

THE END.

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